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Community Based Tourism at Pellumbas Village, Albania

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Community Based Tourism at Pellumbas Village, Albania

Interactive Qualifying Project Report completed in partial fulfillment
of the Bachelor of Science degree at
Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA



Submitted to:
Professor Peter Christopher

In Cooperation With:
The Outdoor Albania Association

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December 19, 2013

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Abstract

There is an untapped tourism potential among the over 1,300 rural Albanian villages. The goal of this project is to recommend community based tourism initiatives to develop tourism in the village of Pellumbas, outside of Tirana. The village features a magnificent cave which has recently been made accessible to tourists by a trail constructed by our project sponsor, the Outdoor Albania Association. Tourists are likely to be attracted by the natural beauty of the area, including the Erzen River, and by the hospitality of the villagers. We helped promote tourism for the village by means of a descriptive brochure, a website and a Facebook page. Based on interviews with villagers, local and regional officials, experts in rural planning, geologists, tour guides and tourists, we developed recommendations that would involve and benefit the villagers.

Acknowledgements

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The Outdoor Albania Association (OAA) for sponsoring and organizing the logistics of our project.

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Executive Summary

The country of Albania features a mountainous, naturally beautiful landscape. Currently, the tourism industry in Albania, “focuses on coastal areas, rather than on the unique features that set this country apart from its neighbors”¹. However, the government recently shifted focus toward increasing tourism in rural areas. The strategy for improving the country’s tourism industry involves rural villages serving as the main attractions for tourists. With over 1,300 villages located throughout the mountainous countryside, Albania can succeed as a tourism destination by highlighting these small villages and communities.

The village of Pellumbas is located approximately 20 kilometers southeast of Albania's capital city of Tirana. The village marks the start of the trail to the unique and mysterious Cave of Pellumbas. One of only six caves in Europe that contain cave bear (*Ursus speleaus*) fossils, the Cave of Pellumbas is a must see natural attraction. The beautiful Erzen River runs near the small village, and is frequented during the summer months for swimming in the turquoise blue water among the natural limestone canyon. The village of Pellumbas offers a rustic, traditional feel, and provides visitors the opportunity to experience authentic Albanian cuisine and freshly made goods. Based on the rural setting of Pellumbas, our research showed that community based tourism would serve as the most viable model for initiating tourism development. Community based tourism is a balancing act between the interests of the community, the interests of tourists, and the conservation of the environment. We worked with Outdoor Albania Association, a Tirana based non-profit organization, “that gathers people, ideas and partners to work together for the development of responsible tourism in Albania.”² Our project focuses on assessing and improving tourism in Pellumbas. The village of Pellumbas and surrounding area can use our recommendations to develop the tourism site further as well as allow the locals to benefit from tourism.

Methods

The Outdoor Albania Association proposed a project on tourism and its management in the village of Pellumbas, with the aim of improving the current practices there. The overall goal of the project was to use community based tourism strategies to provide recommendations for the Pellumbas destination. We developed the following objectives and methods to achieve our overall goal:

¹ Kruja, D., Lufi, M., & Kruja, I. (2012). THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THE CASE OF ALBANIA. European Scientific Journal, 8(19).

² *Outdoor Albania Association - our home*. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.outdooralbania-association.com/Outdoor Albania association/our home.html](http://www.outdooralbania-association.com/Outdoor%20Albania%20association/our%20home.html)

Objective 1: Visit the village as unbiased tourists and researchers in order to determine current tourism practices in Pellumbas. The entire Albania project group, consisting of twelve WPI students and their faculty advisor, hiked to the Cave of Pellumbas and visited the village as tourists. Following the visit, we distributed a questionnaire to the group to assess initial visitor reactions. We designed the questionnaire for the Albania project group to identify specific recommendations for improvements concerning the cave, trail, and village. While visiting the destination as researchers, we recorded detailed observations of the current situation of the Pellumbas destination through photographs and transcripts.

Objective 2: Work with local officials and our liaison to discuss tourism in the Pellumbas village. We interviewed local officials to make sure we were complying with any initiatives that the village or commune were currently pursuing. Additionally, we wanted to understand any regulations that might be in place for the village and surrounding area in terms of tourism or conservation. We asked questions regarding their vision and their opinion of the current tourism situation.

Objective 3: Collect information from tour guides, and villagers to determine possible areas of improvement at Pellumbas. We interviewed local tour guides, and spoke with villagers. We asked tour guides about the success of Pellumbas compared to that of other tourist destinations. Our team had conversations with a few villagers to determine how local residents can become involved with tourism initiatives in Pellumbas.

Findings

Through interviews and observations we were able to evaluate the current tourism practices at the village of Pellumbas. The following are the findings from these methods:

The Cave of Pellumbas, although naturally beautiful and historical, is underutilized and underdeveloped as a tourist attraction. Three tour guides from various tourism companies in Tirana expressed concern with the lack of a trail inside the cave. This makes the cave hard to navigate for visitors, even when a guide is present, and affects the conservation of stalactites and stalagmites within the cave.

The river, near the village and Cave of Pellumbas, is a unique aspect of this region that is not well advertised to the village's visitors. Our liaison and the tour guides we spoke with mentioned that the hike to the Erzen River is an integral part of the Pellumbas experience. The trails need further development and the hike itself needs more advertising, according to the guides.

The current inadequate trail signage and the lack of trail development make it difficult for visitors to find and hike certain areas of the destination. Tour guides and local officials expressed the need to repair signage and further develop trails in the area. The trails to the Erzen River were of specific concern to those with whom we spoke. Our own observations confirmed that without a guide it would be difficult to know where to access the trails or how to navigate them.

Although the village and its citizens have much to offer towards tourism efforts, better organization and management is necessary for a successful tourist destination. The village has difficulty obtaining funds for tourism and lacks overnight lodging options. Currently, there is no system for collecting an entrance fee from visitors who come to see the cave and river, resulting in no revenue to the municipality from tourism in the village. This is due to a lack of tourism management. With regard to infrastructure, every source we interviewed mentioned that the road entering the village is in terrible condition and is in need of repair.

There is currently an unrealized potential for villager participation in tourism at Pellumbas, particularly in the areas of marketing local goods and interacting with visitors. The villagers have many farmed and locally produced goods that they could sell to tourists. There are also only a couple of villagers who speak English, which is a problem for foreign tourists who visit the village. From our observations, there are very few locals involved in tourism at the village of Pellumbas. These points were reinforced by the tour guides, a local guide, and the local officials.

There is a concern for lack of funding for tourism initiatives at Pellumbas. Our liaison and the local officials expressed concern about finding funding sources for completing projects related to tourism at Pellumbas, including the management and maintenance of the site.

Many visitors who explored the Pellumbas destination missed out on the full experience because of a lack of information about the area. From interviewing tour guides and from our own observations, we concluded that the Pellumbas trip would be very hard to do without the help of a guide. The trip is underpublicized and information about the area is only available on the websites of tour guide companies. There is little information on the destination, the difficulty of the hike, and what to bring on an excursion to the village and its surrounding attractions.

Recommendations

After many interviews and two field visits to Pellumbas, we developed recommendations for Pellumbas as a tourism destination. We designed the following recommendations to help implement specific tourism initiatives within the village that will help increase the number of visitors and allow the local community to benefit from tourism.

The Cave of Pellumbas

To increase visitor satisfaction, we found it paramount that a path be established inside the cave. By placing handrails and wooden walkways in hazardous areas, more tourists would be able to comfortably enjoy venturing into the ancient cave without worrying about slipping and falling in mud-covered areas.

The Erzen River

We recommend that advertising and promoting the river as well as the Cave of Pellumbas can serve as a more effective strategy in attracting visitors to the Pellumbas region.

The Trails

Directional signs along the trails are in need of updating. Signs should include information on where the trail leads, the distance to that destination, and the difficulty level of the trail ahead. The trail to the Erzen River needs further development in order to accommodate more visitors.

Village Infrastructure and Management

Since it is difficult to navigate the road to Pellumbas, we recommend that repairs be made to the road and that it be properly maintained. Also, clear directions to Pellumbas need to be made available to visitors to improve accessibility. To help initiate community based tourism in Pellumbas, we recommend that villagers serve as site managers and tour guides. This will help to increase the organization and maintenance of the destination, and help improve visitors' experiences in Pellumbas.

Villagers

We recommend greater involvement from the locals of the village of Pellumbas in tourism initiatives. To accomplish this, we suggest that a place be provided for locals to sell their goods, the youth of the village assist as English translators for foreign tourists, and a two day trip to Pellumbas be established which utilizes and develops local lodging opportunities.

Funding

Many of the proposed projects and initiatives outlined by the report require funding, therefore we advise the creation of detailed plans for projects and the utilization of funding opportunities. We recommend future exploration of funding sources.

Visitors

To develop Pellumbas as a tourist friendly destination, there must be more information available to prospective visitors. This includes information that hikers can obtain before arriving at the destination

and upon arrival at Pellumbas. Our team created three different advertising and information avenues: a website, a Facebook page, and an educational pamphlet. Excerpts of these different advertising materials are shown in Figure 1:

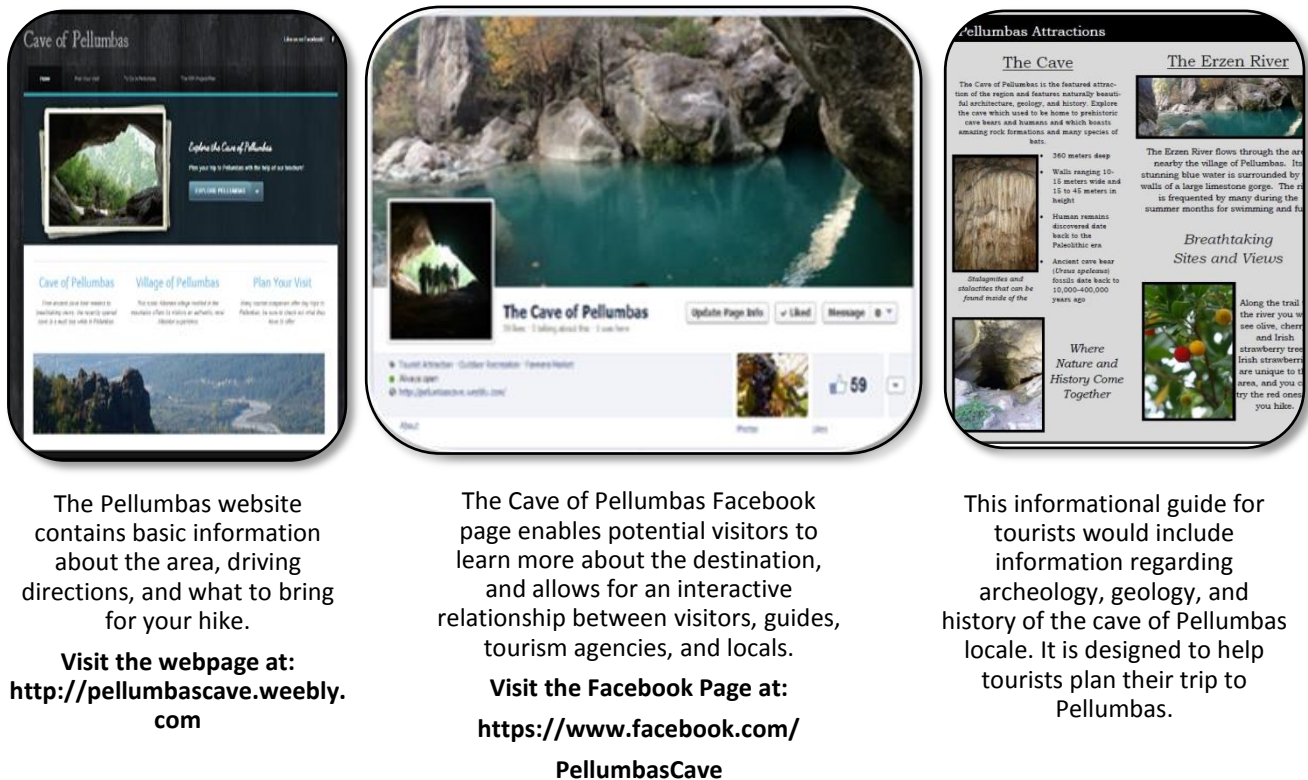


Figure 1: Excerpts of our three advertising materials

Conclusions

The research, recommendations, and deliverables presented in the report provide a refined focus for future work in initiating community based tourism in the village of Pellumbas and surrounding region. The project detailed by the report has the potential to help expand tourism in the Pellumbas region, which would provide economic growth for the small village. The village of Pellumbas could serve as an example for rural settlements throughout Albania in providing a model for community based tourism, and eventually contribute to the spreading of economic independence into the rural areas of Albania.

Authorship

Abstract and Executive Summary: written by Margaret Freed and Elliott Wiegman

1 Introduction: written by Margaret Freed, Tyler Hickey, Laura Merrill and Elliott Wiegman

2 Background: written by Margaret Freed, Tyler Hickey, Laura Merrill and Elliott Wiegman

3 Methodology: written by Margaret Freed, Tyler Hickey, Laura Merrill and Elliott Wiegman

4 Findings: written by Margaret Freed, Tyler Hickey, Laura Merrill and Elliott Wiegman

5 Recommendations and Deliverables: written by Margaret Freed, Tyler Hickey, Laura Merrill and Elliott Wiegman

6 Conclusions: written by Tyler Hickey and Elliott Wiegman

Sections were divided equally among members. All members reviewed and edited each section. Formatting and the Appendices were completed by Margaret Freed and Laura Merrill.

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1. Introduction

Albania offers a rustic getaway experience in an un-commercialized, authentic environment (Richards et al., 2000). In 2008, the Ministry of Tourism published a Sector Strategy for tourism development. This strategy suggests that the development of mountainous and rural areas is a key aspect for the promotion of Albania as an attractive tourist destination. The strategy encourages and supports the, “creation of traditional hosting structures in rural areas, especially in remote mountainous areas and orienting investment towards the improvement of infrastructure in those areas” (*Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013*, 2008). After researching rural areas in other regions of Albania, it is evident that tourism in these small villages progresses individually, rather than as a community effort.

Community based tourism in Albania can help maintain and develop small communities. This type of tourism provides income for rural villages, and can aid in the preservation of natural attraction sites. Community based tourism can develop a sense of unity within villages and help to maintain and expand economic assets. Tourism ideally develops a destination’s economy and infrastructure, but sometimes the benefits are outweighed by the social and environmental impacts of uncontrolled tourism growth. However, sustainable tourism and community based tourism are becoming increasingly popular in addressing risk in tourism growth. Involving local communities reduces poverty and environmental concerns. From these realities, aspects of conservation and community combined to form community based tourism and ecotourism (Saskia, 2011). This community based tourism model applies to many rural villages in Albania.

The village of Pellumbas is located approximately 20 kilometers outside of the capital city of Tirana. The village features many beautiful views, a diverse range of natural resources, and offers tourists an authentic Albanian experience. Currently, the destination attracts visitors because of the unique and mysterious Cave of Pellumbas, located one hour from the village by hike. The cave served as a local shelter in times of unrest and until recently was kept a secret by villagers. Now it attracts tourists with its natural architecture, a thriving population of bats, and rare cave bear fossils. The Outdoor Albania Association (OAA) completed work on the trail leading to the cave in 2009. This development made the Cave of Pellumbas more accessible to hikers by widening the hiking trail, providing handrails at dangerous points, and adding stairs to steep sections. After visiting the cave, adventurers also have the opportunity to hike down the ravine and visit the Erzen River. The river offers an opportunity for visitors to cool down in the clear, blue water after a long day of hiking.

The Pellumbas village and region are underdeveloped as a tourist destination. The village’s biggest difficulties are that they lack the organization and finances to sustain a tourism initiative. These problems are causing issues with the upkeep of the cave as an attraction. For instance, the trail to the cave

has litter along the sides and the cave has been marked with graffiti in some parts. Adding to this location's inaccessibility is the deteriorating state of the only road leading to the village. Currently, only a few tourism agencies offer trips to Pellumbas so it is not a well-known destination. In addressing these problems, we learned that the local community seems to have a positive attitude towards tourism. Additionally, Pellumbas' commune developed a master plan which provides zones for all villages and preservation areas in the commune. Pellumbas has the potential to become a successful tourism destination, however they lack the planning that could help further establish the site. Our team helped overcome these obstacles by assessing the current state of tourism within the Pellumbas region and creating recommendations for improving the site.

The overall goal for the project was to use community based tourism strategies to provide recommendations for the Pellumbas destination. In order to achieve this goal, our team devised several objectives to thoroughly analyze the current tourism situation at Pellumbas and develop recommendations. We observed the village from two separate perspectives in order to determine current tourism practices at the destination: as an unbiased tourist and an observant researcher. Our team also worked with local officials to receive approval for the project, insight on legislation, and their vision of tourism in the Pellumbas village. We collected information from tour guides and villagers to determine possible areas of improvement at the destination. After collecting and organizing this information, our team was able to formulate recommendations for community based tourism, and focus on developing advertising avenues for the Pellumbas destination.

2. Background

The aim of this project is to help create a viable community based tourism plan for the Pellumbas village and region. By determining the visions of stakeholders and taking into consideration the local village and natural resources of the area, we created a plan to maximize its tourist potential. The following section explores the past and present situation of tourism in Albania and the Albanian government's long-term plan for tourism in the country. We discuss how community based tourism can be applied to Albania's rural communities. Examples of locations with conditions similar to those of the Pellumbas village and region can be useful to determine the best ways to support community based tourism for this rural area. Research on community based tourism enabled us to identify challenges faced and strategies used to establish tourism effectively in similar situations.

2.1 The Pellumbas Village and Region

The Pellumbas village and region is located approximately 20 kilometers outside of Albania's capital city, Tirana. This region is mountainous and widespread, and in close proximity to the village are many fascinating, natural resources. The nearby Cave of Pellumbas and Erzen River are two of the more recognized attractions for this region. Figure 2 shows the village in relation to the capital city of Tirana.

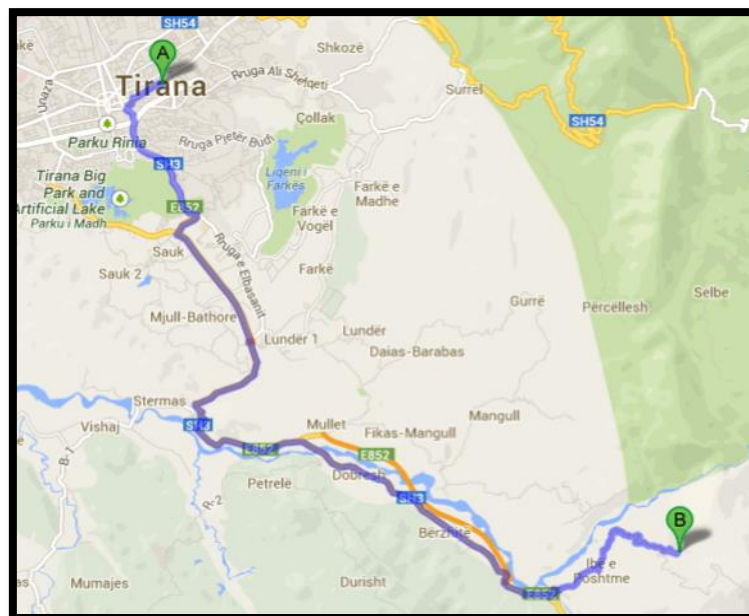


Figure 2: Map from Tirana to Pellumbas (Google Maps, 2013)

2.1.1 The Village of Pellumbas

There is only one road going in and out of the village. Unfortunately, the condition of this road is treacherous and very difficult to navigate. In the village there is a small, central area that contains the only local businesses established in this region including two cafes, which both serve food, and a hair salon.

There are approximately 100 families inhabiting Pellumbas, and they rely heavily on producing their own food and materials to survive. Although there are some income-generating businesses, the majority of the village is considered a subsistence, or non-monetary, economy. We also learned that many villagers produce handmade crafts and items that are unique to Pellumbas. All of these aspects within Pellumbas combine to create a unique, rural tourism destination.

2.1.2 The Cave of Pellumbas

Outside of this quaint village there are many breathtaking mountains and ravines. This natural landscape provides beautiful views. In particular, there is a short hike commencing from the village and ending at the Cave of Pellumbas, also referred to as “The Black Cave” (Shpella e Zezë in Albanian). The entrance to the cave is shown in Figure 3. A Tirana based group, the Outdoor Albania Association, improved the trail’s conditions in 2009, making the cave more accessible for tourists. This cave has been an adequate destination for tourism ventures; however, its history and natural beauty provide potential for an increase in attraction. The inside of the cave stretches approximately 360 meters into the mountainside. Impressive stalactites and stalagmites, formed over thousands of years, decorate the walls of the cave. According to local experts, there was only one recent archaeological excavation of this site, but it is presumed that there is much to be discovered. There are thousands of bats that are active inhabitants of the cave, and provide its visitors with a memorable cave experience. Due to minimal exploration, there have not been many efforts to improve cave navigation, as the floor is mostly mud-covered and sometimes very slippery. A small platform located at the mouth of the cave, built to improve external accessibility, provides visitors a lunchtime hang out, or even a stop to put on headlamps and helmets. These characteristics can provide visitors with a rare tourism opportunity at the Cave of Pellumbas.

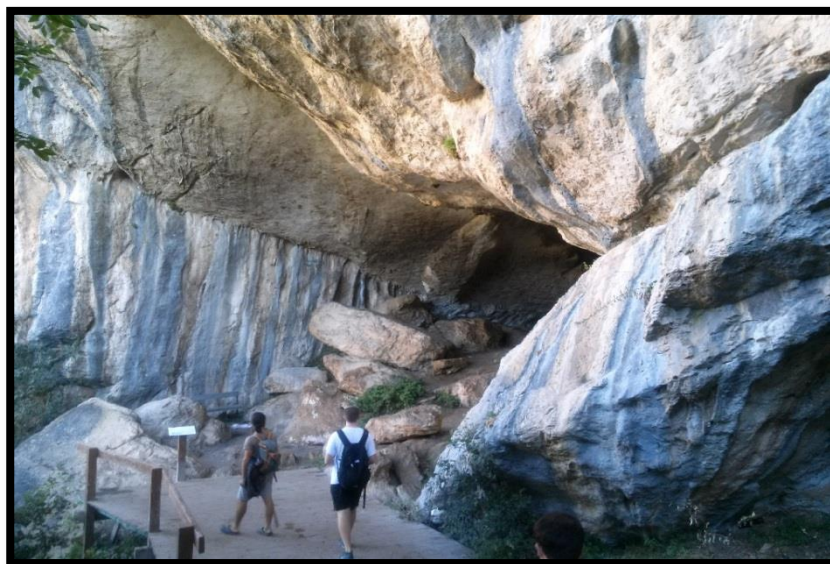


Figure 3: Entrance to the Cave of Pellumbas

2.1.3 The Outdoor Albania Association

The Outdoor Albania Association's purpose is to develop responsible tourism in Albania while preserving the country's diverse nature, rich culture, and ancient traditions. One of the goals of the OAA is to improve access to remote and picturesque areas within Albania. Founded in 2005, the OAA is a nonprofit organization ("Outdoor Albania Association," n.d.). There are four leading members of the OAA who initiate and conduct projects; however, most of the organization is made up of community members and volunteers. The OAA works with local communities and involves its members in their projects. This helps to sustain tourism sites while being mindful of conservation management.

The OAA has completed several successful projects throughout Albania. Of these projects, several took place in Vuno, a small village located on the Albanian Riviera. The OAA began by renovating Shkolla Vuno, a school located in the village. This included installing running water and electricity as well as cleaning up the surrounding area ("Outdoor Albania Association," n.d.). The school now operates as a hostel during the summer ("Tirana Backpacker," n.d.). The OAA also completed a project involving the Church of Saint Mary in Vuno. The church was built in the early 1700s and the OAA worked to restore the roof, as well as clear a path to the church. In addition to the renovations the OAA performed, members also worked to clean up the village. This included cleaning garbage and debris from the village and developing paths to nearby destinations ("Outdoor Albania Association," n.d.).

The OAA completed work on the trail to the Cave of Pellumbas during the summer of 2009. Previously, the trail to the cave was very dangerous due to a narrow, steep pathway. The OAA worked to create a safer, more accessible path by widening it as well as adding stairs and railings along the steeper sections. In addition, the OAA placed signs along the trail and built a platform at the entrance of the cave, which included an information plate. The signs mark the trail to the cave and the information plate mentions the cave's and area's history ("Outdoor Albania Association," n.d.). The work the OAA completed helped to make the hike to the cave tourist friendly. Before and after photographs of the trail are shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Before and after of the trail to the Cave of Pellumbas ("Outdoor Albania Association," n.d.)

2.1.4 Tour Guide Support for the Pellumbas Area

Professional tour guides who often visit the Pellumbas village and region identified areas that could be more developed for tourism. It was the opinion of both a guide from Outdoor Albania and a guide from High Albania Mountain Club that it is important to maintain the authenticity of the site. They felt it was crucial to preserve the unique culture and traditions of Albania's rural villages. Both guides have experience with community based tourism efforts throughout Albania and the Balkans, so their opinions are helpful in planning our approach to establishing tourism at the Pellumbas village and surrounding area.

2.1.5 The Master Plan

The village of Pellumbas is a part of a commune comprised of several villages in the surrounding area. The leader of the commune gave us documents that include a zoning map that outlines a Master Plan for the village of Pellumbas and surrounding region. The Master Plan includes details for further developing the Cave of Pellumbas site, shown in Figure 5. The map shows zoned areas in the region, and the intended development for each area is displayed in the map's key. The Master Plan shows that the commune began to consider the tourism potential within the Pellumbas village and region. Our work can contribute to the details of the Master Plan, and provide recommendations for developing community based tourism for the village and nearby attractions.

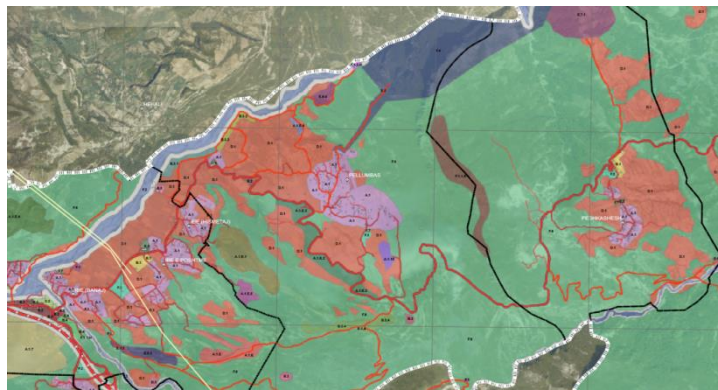


Figure 5: Zoned regions of Pellumbas village

2.2 Growth of Tourism in Albania

2.2.1 History of a Closed Country

Following more than four decades under a communist regime, Albania transitioned from a closed off, nearly inaccessible location to a potentially thriving tourist destination (Richards, 2000). Albania suffered from years of political instability because of problems within the country as well as problems in the surrounding Balkan region (Richards, 2000). Under communist rule, controls on mobility restricted residents from moving to urban areas (Pojani, 2009). According to Vullnetari (2009), there was a large shift in population from rural to urban areas following the communist regime because of the elimination of these controls. Since the fall of communism, "Tirana [had] doubled in population: from 300,000 to

well over 600,000” by 2009 (Pojani, 2009, p. 2-3). In 2011, the population grew to approximately 763,600 (Population and Housing Census in Albania, 2011). The sudden urbanization that resulted post-communism helped to develop Albania’s market economy and democratic government (Pojani, 2009). Even though these examples may seem far removed from the topic of tourism, they show the effects of a rapid governmental change. During this transition, Albania has been working to develop a vibrant and welcoming tourist economy while overcoming past obstacles.

2.2.2 Previous Strategy for Tourism Development

In 2003, the Ministry of Territory Adjustment and Tourism proposed a Strategy for Tourism. The Ministry believed that Albania has a potential to develop more tourism resources, such as a variety of small communities with rich heritage and culture. The plan also recognized that the current tourism system, managed by the government, leaves communities with less control over local tourism (Sector Strategy: Tourism Development in Albania, 2003).

“Macro-economic objectives” were the main concern of the overall objective of the 2003 Strategy on Tourism. This includes generating jobs and income, accelerating economic and social development, improving living conditions, and creating a positive international image of the country (Sector Strategy: Tourism Development in Albania, 2003). The report describes Albania’s future vision for the tourism industry across the country. The three main points of this vision can be seen in Figure 6. While all three of these visions are important, the third vision regarding sustainability and awareness for environmental issues is mainly addressed when working with rural, community based projects in Albania.

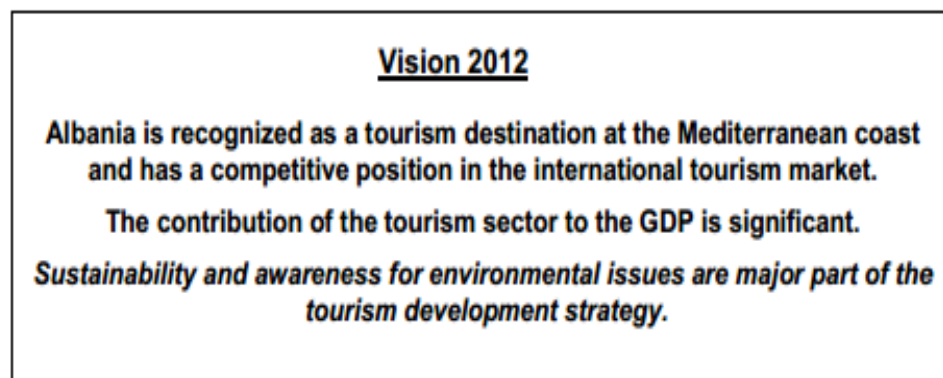


Figure 6: Vision of the desired future of tourism in Albania (Sector Strategy, 2003 report)

The 2003 report specifically identifies the development potential of special interest tourism. Aspects of special interest tourism include ecological and nature tourism. Establishing this type of tourism involves opening and maintaining new historic sites as well as developing national parks (Sector Strategy: Tourism Development in Albania, 2003). The intent of the 2003 report was to capitalize on Albania’s rich biodiversity and cultural heritage.

The plan outlined in the 2003 Strategy on Tourism identified the need for community involvement through supplying tour guides and maintaining cultural sites. The Ministry of Tourism's objective with special interest development was for Albania to be "the last undiscovered destination in Europe, in which precious and rare secrets of nature and cultural heritage can still be discovered" (Sector Strategy: Tourism Development in Albania, 2003).

2.3 Sector Strategy on Tourism

2.3.1 Overview of Tourism Plan

Five years after the publishing of the Strategy for Tourism Development, the Ministry of Tourism wrote a Sector Strategy on Tourism (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). This report outlines the current tourism situation, reasons why Albania is an attractive destination, and steps to improve the overall appeal of Albania as a destination.

Several tourism goals outlined in the earlier tourism strategy remained unaccomplished when the 2008 report was published. Many of these unaccomplished aspects dealt with the establishment of local, sustainable tourism at all levels of infrastructure (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). Sustainable tourism focuses on long term goals and has been described as, "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Holland, 2009). The Ministry of Tourism suggests that they need to improve the publicity of tourism inside and outside the country (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). In 2008, the Ministry of Tourism used these unaccomplished aspects to further design their strategy for improvement.

2.3.2 Present Problems as Identified by the Ministry of Tourism

Albania still faces many challenges in its pursuit of creating a successful tourism industry. There are many other similar, well-established tourist destinations outside of Albania that are competing for tourists' attention. The current mode of large-scale, resort-based tourism that is controlled by outside companies does not directly benefit small, local communities (Holland, 2009). Research suggests that tourists essentially have a "non-image" of Albania, meaning that it is a country that is easily overlooked when tourists are making travel plans (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008).

In the 2007 World Economic Forum (WEF), Albania was ranked 90th out of 124 countries for competitiveness in tourism (Sector Strategy, 2008). The Sector Strategy on Tourism points out,

"The ranking also points to weaknesses that harm competitiveness, such as lack of political will to undertake concrete actions, weak system of environmental protection and management,

involvement (inclusion) of natural and cultural assets in tourism, a difficult investment climate, unresolved land title rights, lack of infrastructure and ineffective promotion efforts” (p. 6).

In the 2013 WEF report Albania’s rank significantly increased to a ranking of 77th out of 140 countries for competitiveness in tourism. This ranking, in reference to Albania’s assets and resources, shows the country has the potential to support tourism (“Travel and Tourism Competitiveness”, 2013). In Lonely Planet’s “Best in Travel 2011” guide, Albania “claimed the number one spot in the top ten countries for 2011” (2010). This ranking describes Albania’s history and culture as a unique tourism experience and as an up-and-coming travel destination.

The Ministry of Tourism identified specific challenges within cultural and nature tourism in the 2008 Sector Strategy on Tourism. There are no “recipes” for tourism; this means that tourism growth must work to be authentic and home grown while still meeting the general expectations of tourists. To accomplish this, general regulations regarding tourism knowledge and a modern tourism industry must be sought, but the product offered by the country must reflect an “authentic Albanian approach.” The Ministry recognizes the need for “efforts to ensure the sustainability of the natural and cultural resources” (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). While local government involvement is crucial in planning and executing community based tourism, the Ministry of Tourism identifies a need for support on a national level as well. The 2008 Sector Strategy also identifies that many small communities may not have the capacity to support local tourism properly and will require help from the central government, Tirana-based institutions, or international experts (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008).

2.4 Albania as a Tourism Destination

2.4.1 “Albania, Yours to Discover”

After releasing the 2003 report on tourism development, Albania’s Ministry of Tourism began to present the country as a desirable tourist destination. The ministry adopted the slogan, “Albania, Yours to Discover” in order to attract visitors to a rustic, authentic destination (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). To make this “discovery” of Albania a successful endeavor, the 2008 Strategy on Tourism included plans to create a diverse range of tourism attractions. The intent of offering a broad cross-section of tourist attractions is that, “visitors will be left with a lasting impression of the diversity, complexity and beauty of the culture and the land” (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). There are a wide variety of attractions that would draw visitors to Albania; these include,

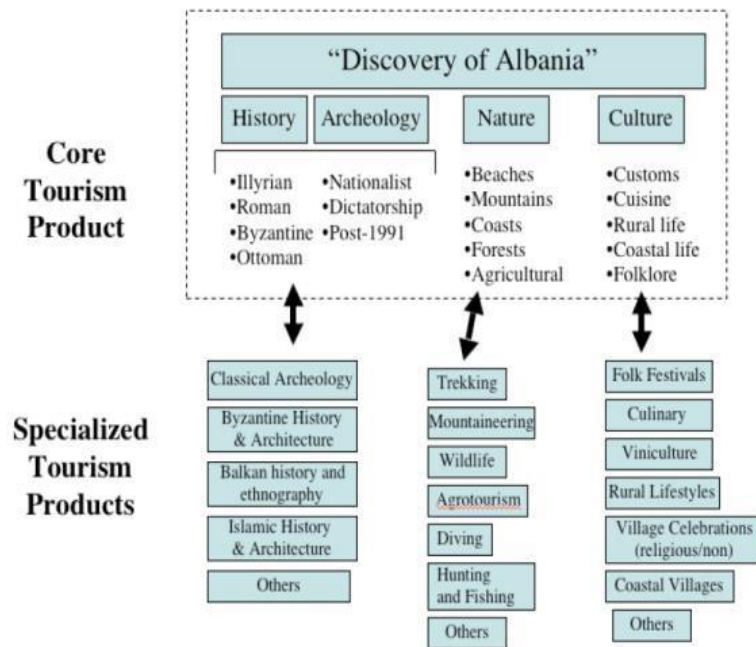


Figure 7: Core and specialized tourism products (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013)

“Long stretches of sandy beach ... mountain ranges, lakes, forests, varied and indigenous wildlife, classical, Byzantine and Ottoman archaeology and architecture, folklore, customs and crafts. All suggest opportunities for developing small-scale niche specialist tourism opportunities in the interior of the country” (Holland, 2009; Richards, Hall, & Ebrary Academic, 2000, p. 54).

Figure 7 organizes many different “tourism products” of Albania which

shows tourism opportunities. According to Albania’s Sector Strategy on Tourism there are three overall destination types: sun and beach tourism, special interest tourism, and business and conference tourism (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008; Sector Strategy: Tourism Development in Albania, 2003). Special interest tourism most specifically pertains to small villages and communities, which is the focus of this project.

2.4.2 Recent Improvements Make Albania More Accessible to Tourists

Albania’s tourism industry made many advances over the last decade; one of the main improvements was the implementation of the law, “On Tourism in Albania”. This law, enacted in 2007, aimed to create a tourism industry that follows international standards. The Sector Strategy on Tourism describes the aim of this law as needing to, “concretely assist the tourism industry development in line with the strategic directions of tourism development, by prioritizing and linking the cultural and natural heritage sources with the development of tourism” (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). The Albanian Government and the World Bank established a plan for sustainable tourism development to create an outline regarding the development of rural areas. The National Tourism Entity was also established in 2005 as an organization to increase the promotion of Albania as a tourist destination (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008).

Since 2003, Albania's tourism industry has experienced a continual increase. The number of foreign visitors was approximately 309,000 in 2003 and it expanded to 1,100,000 four years later (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). Figure 8 shows the increase of gross revenues from tourism from 2004 to 2007. These statistics suggest that tourism in Albania has been steadily improving. However, as Figure 8 shows, although the number of tourists is increasing, on average, each individual is spending less money while in Albania than in previous years.

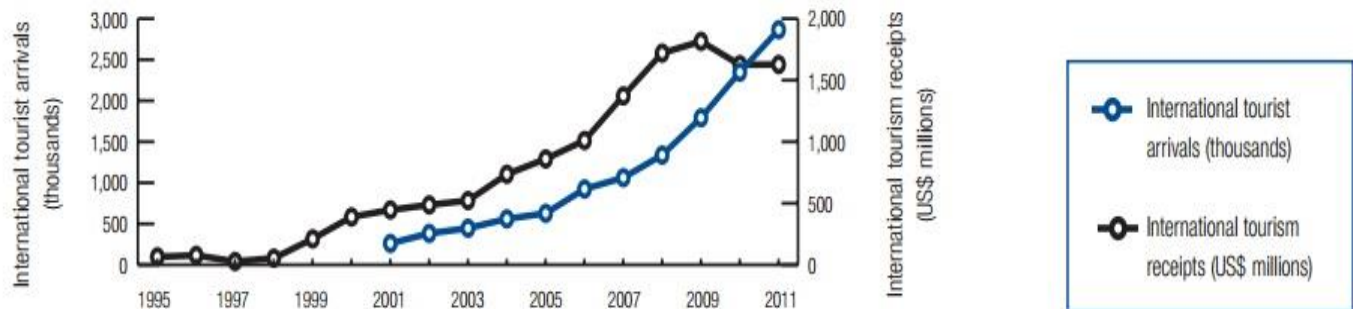


Figure 8: International tourist arrivals and receipts from 1995 to 2011 (World Economic Forum, 2013)

2.4.3 Room for Growth in Rural Destinations

Albania offers a rustic getaway experience in an un-commercialized, authentic environment that can potentially appeal to foreign visitors (Richards et al., 2000). However, current tourist destinations in Albania involve walking around an area for 30-60 minutes, having a meal, possibly going dancing and then leaving. A tour guide from High Albania Mountain Club believes that tourists are just “checking boxes” and not getting the full experience from destinations because of a “been there, done that” attitude. High Albania Mountain Club sets a standard for tourism by guiding its members on trips that incorporate both trekking and cultural interactions. According to the Ministry of Tourism's *Sector Strategy on Tourism*, worldwide there is a current trend in tourism that prefers culture, adventure and eco-tourism. Rural tourism development in Albania has the potential to successfully highlight the many small, rural villages around the country.

The Sector Strategy on Tourism from 2007 suggests the development of mountainous areas is a key aspect in positioning Albania as an attractive destination to tourists. There are approximately 1,300 villages in Albania, which strongly indicates that rural tourism is a feasible development opportunity, particularly for agro-tourism, ecotourism and natural tourism. These types of tourism focus on the environment and rural communities versus a resort-style, mass tourism. The Sector Strategy on Tourism describes the goal of the creation of “village resorts” as, “encouraging and supporting the creation of traditional hosting structures in rural areas, especially in remote mountainous areas and orienting

investments towards the improvement of infrastructure in those areas” (p. 11). Any developments are intended to be built using existing construction in order to keep the rustic and original infrastructure of the area (Sector Strategy on Tourism 2007-2013, 2008). The overall goal of promoting tourism in mountainous areas is the economic development of these local communities. Improving rural tourism in Albania allows visitors to discover diverse opportunities.

According to a guide from High Albania Mountain Club, tourism growth in these rural destinations does not typically progress as a community effort, but instead is an individualized progression without regard for the overall community vision. This feeling of segmented growth in rural areas was also mentioned when we talked to a tour guide for Outdoor Albania. Using the example of the village of Theth, he described how small villages suddenly experience a large influx of tourism. Theth is a village located in Northern Albania that had a sudden boom of tourism. After Albania’s civil war in 1997, many visitors were deterred from visiting the country because of safety concerns. Slowly, Albania began to attract adventurous tourists. These tourists were mostly backpackers looking for a rustic destination and were not overly concerned with the safety of the area. As these backpackers filtered through the country it became apparent that the safety in the country had improved, resulting in more people visiting. It is typical of Albanians to welcome guests into their homes, so often backpackers would stay with local families. As more backpackers and adventure tourists frequented rural destinations, offering to pay their gracious hosts, villagers began to accept and make room to host more tourists. This was a mutual gain for both visitors and villagers. Visitors had a place to stay, while the villagers received extra income. Eventually, this led to villagers moving out of their original homes into smaller ones in order to create more space for overnight guests. This demonstrates how development of a destination can result from individual aspirations. According to the tour guide, Theth is an area that developed in this manner and created a balance between the authenticity of the village and the development brought by tourists. However, he warned that a development like this could eventually cause a loss of authenticity in a rural setting.

2.5 A New Paradigm: Community Based Tourism

Tourism can bring both social and economic prosperity to its destination (Saskia, 2011). However, many mass tourism practices disregard the local culture and environment in order to develop the site and make a profit (Archer, 2005). Community based tourism balances the interests of the tourists, the local community, and the environment. To involve the community in a tourist site, members can sell crafts, own a restaurant, provide lodging, or be an employee of a facility. However, it is not just about efficient and equal distribution of resources throughout the community. Community based tourism is also about, “the sharing of knowledge and the transformation of the process of learning itself in the service of

people's self-development," as well as involving the stakeholders in decision making (Okazaki, 2008). This helps to promote a sense of unity and culture among the community, while promoting tourism. An authentic experience is of interest to many tourists, therefore the integration of local culture and tourism can help promote heritage.

Heritage is an identifying feature of a cultural or social group. It combines the past, the present and the future, encouraging both tradition and modernity. According to Bessiere (1998), heritage is "dynamic and ever-changing." As shown in Figure 9, heritage has opposing ideas. It has aspects that are both innovative and archaic. However, too much modernization stemming from tourism can result in a loss of heritage among locals. Also, locals may be against the incorporation of tourism in their village. Tourism is successful when it balances cultural traditions with the ability to adapt. The inclusion of heritage with tourism in rural Albania results in this authentic experience for visitors as well as gives locals the opportunity to showcase their heritage. As long as the proper balance is found between preserving heritage and accommodating tourists, successful tourism initiatives can develop.

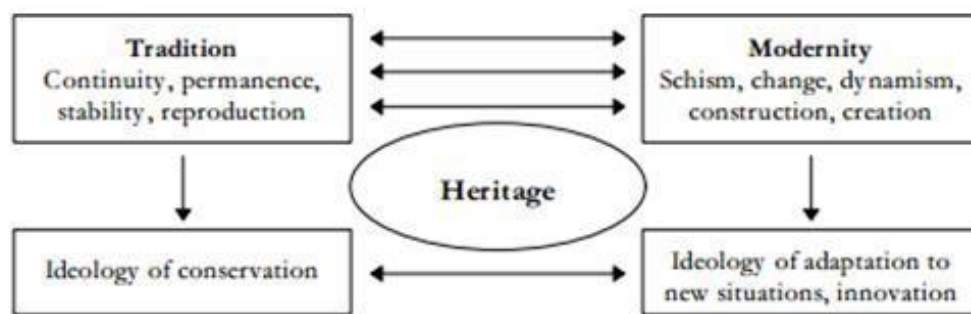


Figure 9: "Tradition and Modernity in the construction of heritage." (Bessiere, 1998, p. 7)

2.5.1 Impacts of Community Based Tourism

Community based tourism incorporates sustainability and conservation methods in order to protect the environment and culture. This often includes the development of an existing site to increase tourism, but also the emphasis on the conservation of the local environment (Richards, 2002). The elevated importance on the environment and culture can help to increase the local pride in the community's heritage (Bessiere, 1998). Ideally, community based tourism would result in the economic development of a rural area, while conserving natural areas and culture.

Critics of community based tourism say that it is not a realistic method as there may be time constraints as well as issues among locals. For instance, there may be a lack of education and business experience. This would result in costs, both time and economic, to train the residents. Also, conflicts may arise before the public is involved. The tourism industry may take advantage of the community or disregard it altogether. New tourist destinations may be seen as invasive, causing these conflicts to arise

(Mehta & Heinen, 2001). It is essential that collaboration occurs between the community and the tourism industry. An unequal power relationship would result in further conflict which would directly influence the tourist experience (Okazaki, 2008).

Community based tourism emphasizes economic development for the locals instead of large travel and tourism companies within the industry. Attempts at implementing community based tourism are not always successful. For example, in the case of Giao Xuan Community Ecotourism Development in Vietnam, the locals did not make a profit. In Giao Xuan, the locals were given employment opportunities, but compared to the people brought in by the tourism companies they earned “not much.” The community was not a priority in Giao Xuan and this is why tourism was not able to reach its potential (Goodwin, 2009). However, in Nambwa Campsite in Namibia, community based tourism is fully established and sustaining. The site received earnings from selling local goods, offering accommodations, and guiding tours. People employed received direct income from the earnings and the community used the rest of the earnings for the upkeep of the conservancy (Goodwin, 2009). These examples show how keeping the funds within the community can keep a tourism site sustained.

To apply community based tourism initiatives in Albania, it is crucial to recognize both the positive and the negative aspects. Successful community based tourism is often a balancing act, regarding collaboration, culture and the environment. According to Goodwin (2009), when local employees have proper education and training, they should receive a fair portion of the destination’s earnings. In order to make the site self-sustaining, some of the earnings should go to the village to fund upkeep of the village infrastructure.

2.5.2 The Application of Community Based Tourism

There are many different ways for community members to become involved in tourism. Some may own lodging or a restaurant or have a craft that they are willing to sell. For locals with knowledge of the local history or environment, there are opportunities to become local guides. Merely possessing knowledge of the industry and participating in tourism is a step toward community involvement. Full-fledged community based tourism occurs when the citizens have complete control (Okazaki, 2008).

According to Okazaki (2008), there are three major levels of community involvement within community based tourism. The lowest level, “non-participation,” is when there is no community involvement and the community lacks tourism knowledge; this lack of involvement is what often sparks community based tourism initiatives. The next level, “degrees of tokenism,” encourages locals to express their opinions and to be informed of their options concerning tourism. This involves communicating to the public how the community and individuals can benefit from tourism. The final level is “degrees of citizen power,” this involves the inclusion of the public in decision making to the point where the citizens have full control of the policy and management of a destination (Okazaki, 2008). It is vital for tourism

destinations to maintain the community's authenticity. As in the case of Kruja, Albania, sometimes aspects of tourism can become overdone by the community's citizens and take away from the authentic experience.

2.5.3 Past Problems of Community Based Tourism in Albania

Several internal factors handicapped Albania's community based tourism. During the communist era, Albania was sealed off from many outside influences. Once the country opened up, Albanians became aware of the "impoverishment and inadequacies of their country in comparison to its neighbors" (Richards et al., 2000). This realization caused a large number of Albanians to leave the country to look for better opportunities. According to Richards et al (2000), the large amount of emigration practically destroyed any sense of community within the country, resulting in a significant loss of the local atmosphere and pride. This movement of people did not just result in citizens leaving the country, but also in a migration from rural communities to urban spaces. A migration of this magnitude is a serious problem for community based tourism, which needs local businesses to sustain rural attractions (Richards et al., 2000). Communism did not allow for community members to make decisions for themselves. Richards describes the past situation of community involvement in Albania,

"Encouragement of community involvement and ownership of development schemes, now more widely advocated for Albania's planning frame work, has been constrained, however, by the legacy of almost half a century of centralized, top-down civil administration, which afforded local people little real opportunity to experience bottom-up development or genuine opportunities to participate in meaningful local decision-making" (Richards et al., 2000, p. 54).

Another problem is that a rural community's tourism goals may not align with the attraction of the destination. A tourist may be attracted to a rural destination by the, "pristine, un-commercialized environment". The community, however, may be looking to improve its amenities through tourism; eventually losing the features that tourists were attracted to in the first place. According to Richards et al. (2000), many communities are hesitant to work towards long term goals and instead lean towards readily available opportunities, even if the short term goals are unsustainable. Long term goals are much harder to establish when there is a possibility of immediate economic relief. Developing countries "pursuing rapid growth and foreign earning often place immediate rewards above long term sustainability" (Holland, 2009).

2.6 Strategies for Implementing and Sustaining Community Based Tourism

Tourism is a widespread institution, and community based projects are a way for unique cultures to take advantage of what they offer to their visitors. These projects are designed to have small villages self-sustain their tourist population, while reaping the economic and social benefits that come with increased visitors. In this case, an outside organization, the Outdoor Albania Association, is interested in helping the village of Pellumbas take advantage of the surrounding resources and fully utilize their village and heritage. Our team found several examples of community growth and tourism evaluation in small communities. From each of these examples we were able to identify certain aspects of each study that related to problems we encountered in Albania. We categorized these different aspects into three primary research questions to help our team in understanding successful community based tourism.

2.6.1 How Has Community Based Tourism Been Established in Certain Areas?

Community based tourism is a complex model for generating successful tourism management, especially when its target audiences are smaller communities, villages or informal settlements. There are many contributing factors in successful community based tourism, but given the variety of resources per location, this analysis focuses more on strategies used to develop tourism initiatives in individual cases.

Bradford, United Kingdom is a small town whose tourism industry has struggled because of the, now obsolete, factories within the town. Overcoming the past image of the town was a challenge they faced, and now they must use stakeholder assets to recreate the town of Bradford's tourism image. The town, as mentioned in the report, is defined as a "difficult area" (Hope & Klemm, 2001, p. 4). A difficult area, as defined by Hope and Klemm, is one that suffers from the following criteria: small tourism base in terms of receipts; unsuitable for tourist development because of a poor "image"; unfavorable social, or economic factors; and in need of infrastructural improvement.

The solution to their problem of tourism decline came in the form of a "private/public sector body called the Bradford Tourism Partnership". Representatives from all of the town's stakeholders (hotel owners, city council members, local employers, citizens, etc.) met once a month in a committee style setting with a structured agenda. The topics that required discussion are as follows: a monthly business plan, research for potential target markets, a brand for the district, and contributions to new financial initiatives in tourism (Hope & Klemm, 2001). This tourism partnership enacted by the town of Bradford is a plan that can be identified as striving for management. This partnership combines all of the local stakeholders and allows them to present any feelings or opinions that they have, in potentially helping to improve business for all parties involved.

Another example of the establishment of community based tourism is Rodna Mountains National Park in Romania. Founded in 2004 under the initiative of Oxford University in England, Rodna Mountains National Park soon became a community based project through the Youth Participation in

Protected Areas Management program. The program involved teaching local students about the natural resources that the area and the park had to offer, and how to protect them. The students were given projects that worked to establish environmental education in the community through awareness and engagement, prepare plans for sustainable management of natural resources, and identify conservation management plans based on biodiversity assessments. Another example from the program included training some students and park employees in assessment technologies like Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to help further conservation management efforts (Szabo, 2008).

The creation of the Rodna Mountains National Park involved stakeholders and members of the community during its establishment period. One example of community involvement is students distributing surveys in the local communities to obtain information on the traditional uses of the natural resources in the area. There was also heavy emphasis placed on preserving and showcasing local traditions. Beyond student involvement, local members from the surrounding communities formed two councils for overseeing the park: the Scientific Council and the Consultative Council. The Scientific Council focused on conservation management efforts in the park and the Consultative Council was a forum used to discuss conservation legislation and the interests of the local community (Szabo, 2008).

The method used to establish the Rodna Mountains National Park serves as an example of an effective method for the establishment of community based tourism. Uniquely, the local students helped in assessing, promoting, educating and researching management strategies. The councils gave community members and local experts the opportunity to be a part of the advisory systems for the park. Total community involvement was used in the establishment of the Rodna Mountains National Park (Szabo, 2008).

2.6.2 How Is the Community Being Effectively Incorporated into Community Based Tourism?

In order to achieve a sustaining community based tourism plan, the community, and all of the active stakeholders in that community, must be willing to participate and contribute. We saw in the previous example that some communities have worked effectively by communicating goals and objectives, and cooperating with one another. Stakeholder relationships play a large role in the establishment of successful tourism because communicating problems and suggestions can create discussion among community members. From these discussions there is the potential of providing solutions to the current problems.

In a study completed by a group of students at The Polytechnic Institute of Hong Kong, the goal was to determine the influence of stakeholder relationships (McKercher & Ho). The students found that there are many factors of a situation that can influence the success and acceptance of tourism. In particular, they generated two lists of relative importance: mitigating conditions that influence relationships, and seven relationships between tourism and cultural heritage management (McKercher &

Ho). Due to the specificity of this case study, it is less important to analyze the specific relationships they identified with Hong Kong's tourism industry. Instead, we looked at the process with which they determined these relationships in further detail as to develop a similar strategy in approaching other tourism locations.

Hong Kong's Tourism Board saw this location as a useful model for the relationship analysis due to the city's variety of established and up-and-coming tourist attractions. The board also identified the importance of cultural tourism in Hong Kong. Using a qualitative method of purposeful sampling, this group developed a brief questionnaire which was distributed to 15 "senior individuals" representing many publicly funded attractions in the area (McKercher & Ho). From these surveys they determined interviewees who would most benefit their research, based on the survey questions asked. Through very specific interviews with targeted individuals, the group was able to analyze all of their data and connect the links in identifying the key relationships between local stakeholders (McKercher & Ho).

In another case study done around the Ruta de las Flores (the Flowers Route) in El Salvador, a group of researchers assessed the current community based tourism model of the area. The Flowers Route exhibits the outstanding natural environment of El Salvador and incorporates the local communities as tourism resources along the route. The researchers surveyed community members on their perceptions about current tourism resources in the area. Locals felt hospitality, accommodation, shops, and food were their most effective community run resources. Following those were transport links, telecommunications, wildlife, and information/education, which they felt were moderately effective for the communities. When asked about how the resources helped the communities, 90% of those surveyed felt that community based resources generated economy, and 87% felt that the resources created employment opportunities for locals (Lopez-Guzman, Sanchez-Canizares, Pavon, 2011).

This case study showcases how a developing country has been able to involve local communities in providing resources for tourism. The community based tourism plan at the Ruta de las Flores incorporates a breadth of involvement in tourism. This involvement ranges from tourist services like accommodations, to activities with nature and culture, to general services such as transportation. Local community members, private companies and national government all benefit from the attractions and services included at this site. Community based tourism along the Ruta de las Flores is a backbone for socio-economic development according to the authors (Lopez-Guzman et al., 2011).

2.6.3 What Strategies Best Keep Revenues within the Community?

Internal funding is an important aspect of community based tourism. Generated revenue must be maintained and kept inside the community. The following example is of a location that takes advantage of maintaining funds within its community.

Butrint National Park is situated in the southern part of Albania. In the early 1990s, after the establishment of tourism in Butrint, it became a UNESCO world heritage site. The park eventually enacted The Butrint Foundation, a strategy used for keeping funds inside the local community. This foundation is a grant-based strategy that uses funds obtained through visitor and tourist entrance fees to sponsor projects dealing with conservation and improvement of Butrint National Park. The motivation behind this idea was that the local communities would benefit from an increase in tourism. If the projects intend to improve the area, while maintaining the site's original integrity as UNESCO protected, then funding would be available for the projects. This foundation increased tourism in the Butrint National Park because of these conservation efforts, and local communities are enjoying the increased tourism population (Wrightson, n.d.). This is an effective example of how a foundation such as this can incorporate internal funding to promote the site.

3. Methodology

The overall goal for the project was to create recommendations for a community based tourism model. We designed this model to implement specific initiatives within the village of Pellumbas to improve tourism. Based on our team's background research we developed three objectives that directly address the project's overall goal in producing deliverable recommendations. These three objectives required data collection from various sources and analysis of the collected data. The methods for achieving these objectives were purposefully structured in order to obtain all of the information necessary to construct a community based tourism model for the Pellumbas village and region.

The first objective states that the team visited the Pellumbas village and region as unbiased tourists alongside the entire Albania project group. This initial visit was to experience the tourism situation in the village as first time visitors. Our team re-visited the village with a researcher mentality and the intention of determining the specific tourism practices within the Pellumbas destination. Before gathering professional opinions of the area, our team investigated how Pellumbas was currently accommodating its visitors. These methods were designed to gather observations and opinions of visitors in the region.

For the second objective we worked with local officials to communicate the purpose of our project and gather their interests and opinions on tourism in the Pellumbas village. Our team realized that we would need support from the leaders of the village and commune for our project to have an effect on the region. We organized meetings with these leaders to gather their opinions on these topics. We chose them because we believed their opinions are representative of the village's opinions. By meeting with these leaders, we were able to help them visualize our intention of this project while also learning about local legislation for enacting future projects.

The third objective required data collection in the form of interviews, conversations, and questionnaires that helped to identify potential areas for improvement in Pellumbas' tourism efforts. In order for our team to create a community based tourism model, the opinions of interested parties needed to be addressed. By interviewing tour guides and villagers, we were able to hear many different perspectives on the potential of Pellumbas as a destination and determine the areas that require the most improvement.

3.1 Visit the Village as Unbiased Tourists and Researchers in Order to Determine Current Tourism Practices in Pellumbas

On Monday, October 28, 2013 all the members of the Albania project group visited the village of Pellumbas and hiked the trail to the Cave of Pellumbas. Since the WPI students in Albania were tourists themselves, they were able to provide us with visitors' opinions of the Pellumbas village and region. Our

liaison, Ilir Hysa of the Outdoor Albania Association, organized the trip and served as our tour guide for the experience. Along the hike to the cave, we were able to take many photographs and enjoy the views of the surrounding area. Ilir provided headlamps at the mouth of the cave and led the group through the cave. He pointed out the various points of interest, such as the stalactites and stalagmites, along the way. The group had lunch made from locally produced food, at one of the village's cafés. In order to assess the Albania project group's opinions of the destination, we sent a questionnaire to those who participated in the hike. This questionnaire can be seen in Appendix D.1 Visitor Questionnaire. We designed these questions to obtain opinions about the experience of the hike from the perspective of a tourist. This was an essential step since this vantage point was lost from our own perspective once we took on the role of researchers in our project.

We observed the village from the viewpoint of researchers. We made a second trip to Pellumbas to visit the Erzen River and to further experience what the village of Pellumbas had to offer as an attraction. We recorded our trip by taking pictures of what we experienced. During our visit we tasted locally made food and drinks at one of the cafes and visited the places along the Erzen River where visitors are taken to swim and hike. The intent of this step was to determine potential areas of improvement, the current status of the village, and any apparent strengths or resources of the area.

3.2 Work with Local Officials and Our Liaison to Discuss Tourism in the Pellumbas Village.

We conducted an interview with our liaison, Ilir Hysa of the OAA, in order to obtain his vision of our project. In completing this interview, Ilir mentioned that a project like ours involves significant contribution and coordination with the villagers. Ilir helped our team to organize individual interviews with both the mayor of the village of Pellumbas and the mayor of the commune to which Pellumbas belongs. The purpose of interviewing these officials was to make sure we were complying with any initiatives that the village and commune were currently pursuing and to understand any regulations that might be in place for the village and surrounding area in terms of tourism or conservation.

We interviewed the mayor of the village of Pellumbas about his personal opinion of tourism in the village, explained why we were in Albania, and the purpose of our project in order to help him understand our presence in the village (See Appendix D.2). From our interview we gained a valuable perspective on tourism in the village. Ilir served as our translator for this interview.

A commune is a collection of villages that are governed by a mayor and a municipal council for the purpose of political divisions. When introducing our project to the commune mayor, he responded by introducing the master plan that had been approved by the Albanian government, outlining the future uses of the commune. He noted their ideas for the improvement of the tourism situation at Pellumbas,

including developing trails to the cave and river and maintaining the road to the village. The office of the commune provided our team the digital file for the zoning map that outlined the intended purposes of the land in the village and commune. We looked through the zoning maps and translated the key to our best ability in order to figure out what the zoning map depicted. We also gave the file containing the master plan to Oltion Kadaifciu to review it, translate, and respond to the current initiatives of the commune. Oltion is affiliated with our sponsor, the OAA, and works with documents like these at the Albanian Development Fund, so his professional opinion was very valuable.

3.3 Collect Information from Tour Guides, Visitors, and Villagers to Determine Possible Areas of Improvement at Pellumbas.

To determine how to implement community based tourism within the village of Pellumbas, our team first assessed Pellumbas' current state of tourism. As mentioned earlier, we began by distributing a visitor questionnaire to the group of students at the WPI Albania Project Center after their trip to Pellumbas. The questionnaire focused on their perceptions of the experience and their suggestions for improvement.

We interviewed several tour guides who give tours all around Albania, including to the Cave of Pellumbas. Our liaison recommended two Tirana based tourism companies to contact: Outdoor Albania, an agency that coordinates tours focusing on Albanian culture and nature, and High Albania Mountain Club, whose tours focus on trekking and hiking. We conducted separate interviews with tour guides from each company. We asked them questions regarding their opinions of Pellumbas as a tourist destination as well as the feedback they have received from visitors they have guided to the cave (interview questions can be found in Appendix D.3 Tour Guide Interview Questions). The perspective of the tour guides' provided us an idea of successful aspects of tourism as well as aspects in need of improvement within Pellumbas. Our team considered other methods which included posting a sign-in sheet at the start of the trail as well as an optional questionnaire to be given to tourists. However, since we were doing the evaluation during the off-season, we realized that we would not be able to collect a large enough sample for our project.

To evaluate how members of the Pellumbas community could contribute to a community supported destination, we conducted interviews with key members of the village. Ilir Hysa directed us to these individuals. We led an interview with the owner of one of the local cafés and with the individual who used to be formally in charge of tours to the cave and collecting fees at the entrance of trail to the cave. Our team conducted the interview with the café owner and former gatekeeper simultaneously at the village of Pellumbas. Ilir Hysa served as the translator in the interview. The questions asked in the interview were prompts to determine how the community could be involved, any knowledge the villagers

had about the cave, and their opinions on tourism in Pellumbas. We asked about food, drinks, and local craftworks that are produced in the village. The purpose was to determine how locals could become involved in community based tourism initiatives and how they could play a role in the development of the Pellumbas destination. The interview questions can be found in Appendix D.4 Interview Questions for Villagers.

3.4 Analysis of Collected Data

The majority of the data collected in this project was qualitative data from interviews and observations. Our team used a systematic method for sorting through the data in order to recognize the most essential and relevant information. During interviews accurate notes were kept regarding what was said, reactions to certain questions, and any extra information added by our liaison, Ilir Hysa. We discussed the transcripts from the interviews as a team and typed them so that they would be in a clearer and more organized format.

When analyzing the information collected from our interviews and observations, we read through all of the recorded information. The intention of the read through was to remind ourselves of the full scope of data we would be dealing with in the project. After understanding the full scope of the data another read through was conducted, this time with a pen in hand, to pull out relevant key words, phrases, sentences and sections from the transcripts. We considered relevant information to be something that is repeated in several places, surprising, or stated explicitly as important information by the interviewee.

We had to weigh the opinions of the various stakeholders to determine potential options for the Pellumbas region. Our group noticed several trends in the information collected from various interviews. This included areas within the Pellumbas region that needed improvement as well as potential areas to increase tourism. However, some opinions differed regarding the future development of the cave and trail. By gathering opinions from the interviews we were able to decide on our recommendations for the Pellumbas region. We also divided our recommendations into the following categories: the Cave of Pellumbas, the Erzen River, the trails, village infrastructure and management, villagers, funding, and visitors. These categories enabled us to better organize and structure our recommendations based around factors that could contribute to community based tourism in Pellumbas.

After creating a general set of recommendations, our group chose to focus on the advertising and promoting of Pellumbas as a tourist destination. This decision was made through a conversation between our liaison, Ilir Hysa, and his colleague at the OAA, Oltion Kadaifciu. By presenting all of the collected findings in an organized format during this meeting, Ilir and Oltion were able to discuss with our team the area in which we could have the biggest immediate impact.

4. Findings

After an analysis of our interviews and observations, our team categorized the collected data into seven sections: the Cave of Pellumbas, the Erzen River, the trails, village infrastructure and management, villagers, visitors, and funding. Each section has an accompanying finding relating to challenges Pellumbas is facing as a tourist destination. We identified these challenges from our own experiences in Pellumbas and from the people we interviewed. The interviewees provided recommendations for the increase of community involvement and further development of the village of Pellumbas.

4.1 The Cave of Pellumbas

The Cave of Pellumbas, although naturally beautiful and historical, is underutilized and underdeveloped as a tourist attraction.

Of the people we interviewed, many considered the Cave of Pellumbas the primary attraction of this tourism destination. We received suggestions for improving the quality of the cave experience in order for it to serve as a viable main attraction for the Pellumbas village and region. We collected data in the form of interviews and observations, which provided us with many suggestions for improving the Cave of Pellumbas for its visitors. Figure 10 shows the entrance to the Cave of Pellumbas.



Figure 10: Cave of Pellumbas

Cave navigation is often a difficult aspect in cave exploration. When we first visited the cave it was apparent that effectively maneuvering the path inside of the cave is difficult for many visitors. Our liaison, Ilir Hysa, pointed out the constant dripping of water from the ceiling of the cave onto the floor. As a result, the path leading through the cave becomes slippery, muddy, and nearly impassable in some areas. A tour guide from Outdoor Albania told us that he would like to see a path inside the cave to make it easier for the cave's visitors to navigate. Our peers who visited the cave, a tour guide for Discover Albania, the former gatekeeper, one of Pellumbas' café owners, and even the mayor of Pellumbas' commune mentioned this idea. These opinions show that there is serious interest in the improvement of the inside of the Cave of Pellumbas to better attract visitors. In particular, it was interesting to hear that the commune mayor had this idea because it showed our team that the master plan may be interested in sponsoring and following through with this type of project.

A tour guide we interviewed from High Albania Mountain Club added that the path would also reduce confusion on where visitors should walk. The cave stretches approximately 360 meters into the mountainside, and after only one turn the light and visibility are gone. At this point there are many break-offs within the cave that can be very confusing to navigate with only a simple headlamp, according to Ilir Hysa. Additionally, there are many sections of the cave that are only puddles of mud, not easily distinguished from mud-covered hard ground. For these reasons, many responses suggest creating a plan to implement a more effective path inside the cave. In order to complete this task, the path would have to be made using something that would not emit any light in order to leave the bats that live within the cave, undisturbed.

Some of the options discussed were reflective tape or luminescent paint, which only reflects when hit by light, or constructing a physical path with platforms to walk on and handrails to hold onto in difficult areas. Table 1 is a comparison of the options we explored for such a path:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Luminescent Tape / Paint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More cost effective -Quick fix -Minimal damage to cave's natural integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Water may cause loss of adhesiveness -Reflections may still be momentarily harmful to bats
Physical Path / Railings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More permanent fix -Rails cause less damage to stalagmites/stalactites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Much more expensive (requires estimate) -Might take away from the natural feel of navigating the cave

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages Comparison for Cave Path

All methods present challenges for long term solutions. As the chart points out, the problem with tape or paint is one of longevity and how the cave condensation affects the adhesive nature of both objects. With the path and handrails, the problem is a matter of material, if it will rot or be damaged, and

how expensive it would be to construct everything. It is also important to respect the natural appearance and feel of the cave.

The mayor of the village of Pellumbas he was very informative about the village's and cave's history. The cave used to serve as protection for villagers during the Ottoman era and the Nazi occupation in World War II. There is also an excavation site near the mouth of the cave that determined the age of the rock and the ancient bear fossils discovered during the original exploration. A tour guide from Outdoor Albania heard about these bear fossils in Pellumbas, and mentioned that they are a very rare species of bear, mostly found in this region. Both the tour guide and the mayor of the village mentioned that providing informational signs would help organize this information and effectively provide it to hikers. It would add an educational and historical aspect to the hike, in addition to the beautiful views and sights.

Another interesting part of the cave is the intricate stalagmites and stalactites that adorn the walls and roof of the cave (shown in Figure 11). These fascinating formations developed over thousands of years by the water that drips from the cave's limestone ceiling. However, the tour guide from High Albania Mountain Club noted that these stalagmites and stalactites can be severely damaged by minor human interaction. The oils from our skin can interrupt the formation and ultimately slow down the process that is required to create these magnificent, natural objects. The following is a photograph of the stalagmites and stalactites in the Cave of Pellumbas.



Figure 11: Stalagmites and stalactites inside the Cave of Pellumbas

The suggestions we received in our interviews related to this topic mentioned a need to increase informational resources for visitors. This is a suggestion that should be considered in the near future. As the professional tour guide mentioned, improved signage would add an educational aspect to the visit to the cave, and signs inside of the cave could reduce harm done to the formations.

Recently, the OAA constructed a platform near the mouth of the cave. They completed the platform in 2009 with the intention to better accommodate tourists coming to the Cave of Pellumbas. Ilir Hysa told us that the idea was to create a communal area where visitors could stop, prepare for going into the cave, and rest for a bit before leaving. In speaking with a tour guide from High Albania Mountain Club, we learned that not everyone is in favor of this platform. He believes it only creates a spot for visitors and villagers to throw their trash where it is less noticeable, and the platform took away from the cave's natural entrance. After visiting the cave ourselves, we saw that it was full of trash on the underside of the platform. After hearing his input on this situation we considered all possibilities in creating recommendations. The trash issue was something Ilir and his team did not expect when completing this project, but from this experience we can better design our plans to satisfy the majority of interested parties.

Another issue raised by several individuals was the availability of equipment required for cave exploration. As mentioned previously, cave visibility is zero as soon as the first turn inside the cave is taken. Therefore, it is necessary for visitors to have proper headlamps in order to see and walk in the cave. In the past, visitors used helmets, as some parts of the path are quite slippery from the dripping rocks. The former gate keeper told us that there was a supply of approximately 30 headlamps to provide to unprepared visitors. Unfortunately, this supply dwindled over time between lost and broken lamps, for which the village could not fund their replacement. These safety concerns will assist in creating the best recommendations for improving the Cave of Pellumbas experience.

4.2 The Erzen River

The Erzen River, near the village and Cave of Pellumbas, is a unique aspect of this region that is not well advertised to the village's visitors.

The Erzen River, which runs through a gorge located down the hill from the village, is currently underpublicized as a tourist attraction. When searching for Pellumbas on the Internet, the only highlighted attraction in the village is the Cave of Pellumbas. During our team's trek to the river, Ilir Hysa said that visitors who only see the cave and the village were not "getting the full experience" in Pellumbas. Therefore, we sought opinions of many individuals with knowledge about the river in order to better include it as an attraction.

While the river is a must see when visiting Pellumbas, individuals, including professional tour guides, commented that seeing the river, the cave, and the village in one day is too much for some visitors. One possible solution that several people we interviewed mentioned was making Pellumbas an overnight destination. If feasible, this would provide visitors with plenty of time to get the full experience, however there still may not be enough attractions to spend two complete days in the village.

Our team is very interested in making this attraction more popular, because we experienced its natural beauty and entertainment.

During our team's visit to the river we discovered valuable information about the area. Led by the former gatekeeper, we made the one hour hike through the fields and into the gorge. He informed us that the path takes its travelers through the farming fields used by the villagers. We walked past cherry trees, locals picking olives, and a garden with pumpkins, peppers, lettuce and more. This hike is a truly unique experience, as he pointed out, because it gives visitors insight to the everyday lives of villagers. Once in the gorge and next to the water we were greeted by incredibly crystal clear, blue water. Figure 12 is a photograph of the river taken during our visit.

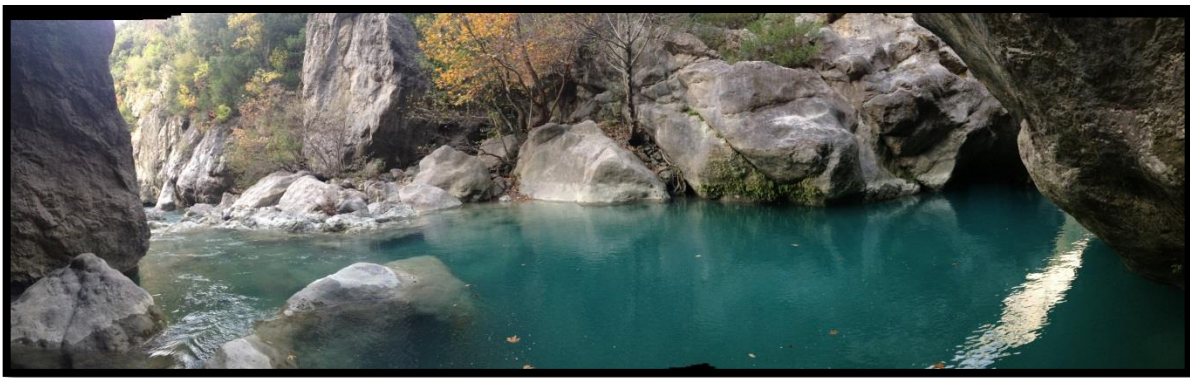


Figure 12: View of the Erzen River

Ilir Hysa accompanied our team on this trip and was very enthusiastic about the inclusion of the river as a tourist attraction. One of his suggestions was creating a campsite alongside the river so interested visitors could spend the night in the gorge and hike back to the village the following day. When mentioned to other interviewees, the idea received positive feedback. However, the issue presented in pursuing this plan is one of mapping the area. Part of the hike runs along the river for approximately a mile. This is one of the least traveled paths because of lack of publicity and the time needed to complete the hike along the path. Therefore, mapping the area would give visitors a much more accurate idea of how long the hike to the river is and the different paths to get there.

The former gatekeeper was very enthusiastic in providing us information about the river. We learned that this river has always been a main water source for the village, and is used as a swimming location in the summer for the villagers. Unfortunately, this information is nowhere to be found on the Internet, or in any advertisements for the village of Pellumbas. As the village mayor communicated to us, they are not trying to keep Pellumbas a secret and this information can be used to create a more intriguing and informative advertising strategy. It is apparent that the river is being overlooked as a part of this destination and can be included to make Pellumbas even more attractive to tourists.

4.3 The Trails

The current inadequate trail signage and lack of trail development make it difficult for visitors to find and hike certain areas of the destination.

The first directional sign that visitors encounter on the way to Pellumbas is located a fair distance down the road from the center of the village. Tourists who are unfamiliar with the area would find this initial lack of directional signage difficult in finding the start of the trail to the cave. The road in the village that leads to the start of the trail is also not well marked in terms of directing potential visitors to the cave and river. Tourists encounter forks in the road through the village with complete absence of signs. The first sign encountered was installed by the Outdoor Albania Association in 2009 and is currently faded with pieces missing. Figure 13 compares the old and current state of the trail sign installed by the OAA. There are also no signs directing tourists to or along the trail to the river; making it very difficult to find without a guide. The trail to the river is currently overgrown and narrow. Tourists mentioned that their entire experience at the destination was ruined because they became lost and could



Figure 13: Trail signage in 2009 (left) and current trail signage (right)

not find their way to the river. According to our liaison and the former gatekeeper, the trail to the river from the cave is also difficult and steep in several places. This level of difficulty is not advertised to visitors and an inexperienced hiker might unknowingly find themselves in a hazardous situation.

There are several proposals that would improve the signage and development of the trails in the Pellumbas region. These recommendations were mentioned through various interviews and also formulated from our own observations and background research. One improvement that was a common theme throughout our interviews is replacing and adding directional signs along the trails. Members from the Albania project group suggested including new signs on all paths connecting the village, cave and river. Signs are most critical at the beginning of each trail and at points where two or more paths intersect.

The development of the trail down to the river is of particular interest to many individuals we interviewed. Because of the current lack of trail markers and the overgrown path, the trail is especially difficult to follow. A section of the overgrown path is shown in Figure 14. This particular topic is a point of discontent between some interviewees. The Outdoor Albania Association envisions the development of this trail to be very similar to the project the organization completed on the cave's trail in 2009. Developing the river trail with a similar method would include widening the trail, and the installation of handrails and stairs at dangerous points along the hike. These improvements would create a more accessible hike for a greater number of visitors to the destination. Other interviewees expressed interest in keeping the area more natural and undeveloped. This type of development would still include marking the trail to make it easier to follow, but would not alter the natural landscape of the hike. Leaving the trail in a more unmaintained state could be more appealing to adventure tourists.

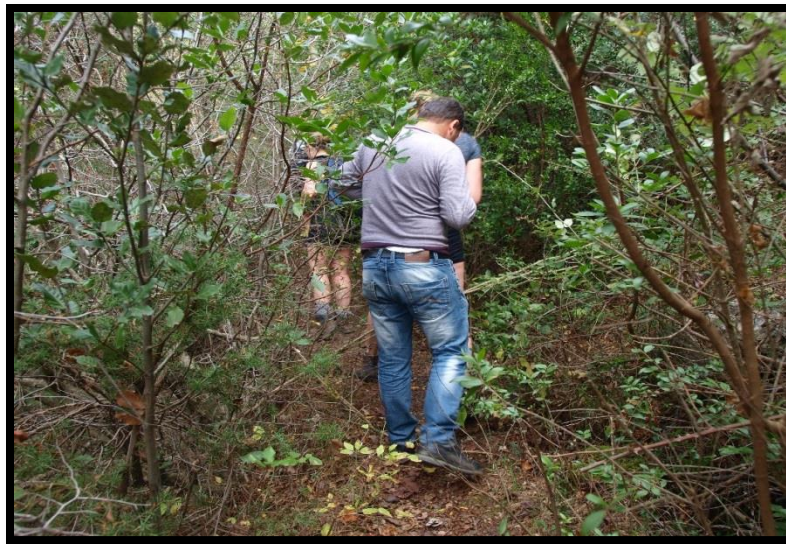


Figure 14: Overgrown trail to the Erzen River

4.4 Village Infrastructure and Management

Although the village and its citizens have much to offer towards tourism efforts, better organization and management is necessary for a successful tourist destination.

Pellumbas has potential for success because it offers its visitors a rural Albanian experience. The lack of organization with the village infrastructure and management in Pellumbas contributes to reasons why the village is not as prosperous from tourism as it could be. Problems dealing with maintaining funds within the village, overnight lodging, business organization, and getting to and from Pellumbas hindered its growth into a successful tourist destination. Through interviews and our own observations, our team was able to identify areas of concern and possible recommendations as suggested by various interviewees.

There is currently no strategy recognized for managing Pellumbas as a tourist destination. Previously, there was a gatekeeper who collected a small fee at the entrance of the trail and coordinated tours to the Cave of Pellumbas. However, the local government distributed the tourism revenue throughout the commune and the remaining profit was unable to support him as an employee. According to the mayor of the village there are currently a few local guides in Pellumbas, however they are not trained and their tour guide services are unorganized and overpriced. Of the tour guides and locals we interviewed, many felt that it would be beneficial to train local guides in Pellumbas, as well as train and employ site managers to help with maintenance and the organization of tours. The training of the local guides could involve education on the history of the cave to help with informing visitors, English speaking for foreign travelers and first aid. As suggested by a tour guide from Outdoor Albania, outside tourism agencies could train local guides. By having a local site manager, there would be someone available to book tours, collect an entrance fee and be sure the trails are maintained. If the management of tourism becomes more organized by employing locals, more revenue will come into the community to sustain these positions.

Currently, there is no overnight lodging within the village of Pellumbas. There is nearby lodging at Resort Teater Kame, located just outside of Pellumbas, but it is not affiliated with the village. Tourist accommodations within the village could help to grow Pellumbas as a destination. Currently, the trip to Pellumbas is offered as a one day trip through several tourist agencies, such as Outdoor Albania and High Albania Mountain Club. However, several tour guides feel that there is a possibility to expand the site to an overnight destination. This type of destination could offer tourists an authentic, rural Albanian experience, and offer lodging to visitors traveling from further areas. By offering lodging sites managed by locals, tourists will have a more organized and traditional stay at Pellumbas.

There are two cafes in the village of Pellumbas. Although these cafes seem to be experiencing success, our liaison pointed out that they need better management and organization. Both cafes have small shops where some local products are sold, however these shops are small and, based on our team's experiences, go easily unnoticed. These shops could showcase local villagers' products. This would help to expand the shops and could make them more noticeable to visitors. The lack of signage within Pellumbas has a negative effect on the cafes as well. By putting more effort into the maintenance of the buildings, signs, and shops, these cafes would experience greater success.

Most of the individuals we interviewed and spoke with commented on the difficulty of traveling to and from the village. Pellumbas, approximately 20 kilometers outside of Tirana, is not well advertised from the main road because of lack of signage. A single broken sign indicates the entrance to the village of Pellumbas. The main road to the village presents another issue because it is not well maintained. Cars must maneuver around giant potholes in the road when traveling to the village. The road, already in bad

condition, is continually worsened by the travel of large trucks that carry rocks mined from the nearby mountain. There is also minimal public transportation between Tirana and Pellumbas. If Pellumbas were more accessible, the number of visitors could increase. A possibility suggested by the Mayor of Pellumbas was to have local transportation take visitors to and from the village. This could also provide a means of income for some villagers either by bringing homemade products to Tirana for selling, or bringing visitors to the village to buy their products.

4.5 Villagers

There is currently an unrealized potential for villager participation in tourism at Pellumbas, particularly in the areas of marketing local goods and interacting with visitors.

The involvement of villagers with tourism is an issue recognized by the various people that we interviewed. One portion of that problem is the unrealized potential of villagers selling their homemade goods to tourists. A tour guide from High Albania Mountain Club said that villagers need education on how to better approach tourists, for instance, in providing goods to sell to tourists. He said the villagers need examples of this and need education on what they have to offer and how to offer it. The mayor of Pellumbas suggested that if more visitors passed through the village then more villagers would want to get involved. He also recognized that locals produce many goods but do not sell them. He thought that if the women of the village sold their handicrafts and other products it could contribute to this tourism initiative. The mayor also said that villagers would all be willing to participate if they saw others making money. The former gatekeeper said that villagers may show interest in selling goods but probably would not show interest in doing the actual selling themselves. He also thought traditional and religious holidays, such as St. George day or Islamic holidays celebrated by the villagers, could interest visitors. The owner of the café said that he would be willing to sell local goods through his shop. The mayor of the commune told us that they are aware of potential benefits for local shops if they opened for the purpose of selling village products. A guide from Outdoor Albania added the idea of creating a local market, encouraging tourists to buy fresh foods in Pellumbas instead of in Tirana.

Every individual we interviewed expressed interest in villagers selling goods such as produce, dairy products, meat, jams, sauces, wine, raki (a traditional Albanian, alcoholic drink), olive oil, and handicrafts. Figure 15 shows some of the local products. They all felt that this could be a way to attract visitors and a way for villagers to benefit financially from increased visitors. It could also queue interest in participation of more locals in tourism efforts. Possible venues for selling these goods could be individual sale, an established village market, or having villagers sell their goods to established businesses such as the cafes. A guide from Outdoor Albania also made the point of trying to keep the selling of materials authentic to the village. He gave examples from another village where a woman was

only marketing her handmade rugs to foreign tourists. This was apparent through her sign that read “handmade rugs for tourists” and her prices for the rugs that were displayed in Euros instead of Leks (the currency of Albania). If villagers decide to sell their products they will have to keep an authentic mindset. He said it is important to market these products to Albanians too. The former gatekeeper and the mayor of Pellumbas felt that the issue would not be a lack of interest from villagers but instead a lack of people to initiate villagers in selling their goods. In keeping in line with the goals of community based tourism, it is also vital that the profits made from the selling of goods stay within the village. To accomplish this villagers have to organize and carry out the selling of local goods in the village.



Figure 15: Locally produced goods: wine, cheese and grapes

Another issue mentioned in multiple interviews was the lack of lodging for tourists at Pellumbas. A tour guide from High Albania Mountain Club related the possibility of having villagers host tourists to his knowledge of the development of the destination of Theth, and how he feels it can be an effective way of attracting tourists, more specifically foreigner tourists. He said that from experience, foreigners enjoy staying in traditional housing and getting the authentic Albanian experience. The former gatekeeper said that the opportunity is there for villagers to host guests in their homes. He felt that if someone were to start this initiative then others would follow, but it will be difficult because hosting guests is not as apparent in their culture as it is in other areas of Albania.

Offering traditional houses for lodging would most likely target foreign visitors, which account for approximately 40% of the village’s tourists, according to the former gatekeeper. There is also an argument that lodging services are not needed at the site because visitors can visit most of the attractions in a full day. A tour guide from High Albania Mountain Club said that the destination could succeed as a day trip, but if there was an option for an overnight stay, visitors could spend more time at the cave and the river. Although there are no lodging options inside the village, it may not be necessary to pursue this objective as priority. For any visitors interested in staying overnight, the Resort Teater Kame is located only a five-minute drive outside of the center of Pellumbas.

Ilir Hysa showed interest in renting one of the abandoned homes in the village. As a leading member of the OAA, his primary interest is that a house would allow his team to spend more time in the village when working on proposed projects. With plans to renovate a house, Ilir also hoped this could provide a similar lodging experience to the authentic way of living in the village. He also envisions that a house could keep supplies for the various excursions in Pellumbas, including headlamps and trail maps.

One of the local café owners said the villagers are not convinced on the benefits of renting houses, and are usually only willing to sell vacant houses. However, renting a house would cost less than buying one and would allow for more funds to go towards renovation. He thinks renovating a house is a good idea and would be better for someone outside the village to do because it would be easier to initiate. The former gatekeeper says that people from Tirana already buy houses in Pellumbas, which he sees as a good thing because there are more contributors to the infrastructure of the village. If funding was available for such a project, then a house could be purchased and renovated. However, it may not be as pressing of an issue for the initiation of better tourism practices within the village.

Another issue addressed by those we interviewed was education within the village. Education breaks down into two primary problems in the village of Pellumbas: lack of English speakers, and lack of knowledge about tourism. The owner of the café said the villagers need a way to receive tourists but most locals struggle with English. He also said that in two to three years there will be more young people who speak English in the village, as it has been included recently in local schooling. He mentioned that the interest in English is growing among parents and students, but some students leave for Tirana in search of more opportunities in education. Both the former gatekeeper and the café owner see the growing number of English speaking villagers as a benefit to the tourism industry.

A tour guide from Outdoor Albania said that it would be beneficial for an outside company to train local guides. Being a trained guide, he saw that there was much to learn from formal training and proper tour guide education could provide visitors with a much more informed experience. The guide from High Albania Mountain Club saw the need for villager education on how to properly communicate with tourists, especially when selling goods. Both professional tour guides and the mayor of Pellumbas made the observation that villagers are still throwing their trash along the trail and that they are unaware of the negative effects this has on the tourism and the environment at Pellumbas. Both agreed that the education of the villagers on tourism and preservation is imperative. These various problems within the village contribute to the unrealized potential of Pellumbas as a tourist destination.

Improving education of the villagers with respect to tourism could help to establish community based tourism in Pellumbas. With a recognized desire to learn English, the villagers seem to understand that a skill like this would be useful in their everyday lives, especially with respect to tourism. Currently, they still lack this education and it is the opinion of those we interviewed that there is unrealized potential

with tourism in the village of Pellumbas. Training and educating locals on their approach to receiving tourists could benefit them greatly and help to make selling goods, giving tours, and hosting visitors possible. If they are aware of the opportunity for tourism within Pellumbas, and are shown the proper way to interact with and benefit from tourists villagers will be able to contribute more to a community based tourism effort in Pellumbas.

Another issue addressed in many interviews was the lack of community ownership within the village. The mayor of Pellumbas mentioned that the problem is with ownership is that people do not recognize the difference between public and private property. He addressed concerns about illegal development in the village that may result from an increase in tourism. It was frustrating to Ilir Hysa that some railings which the OAA placed along the trail to the cave had the wood taken from them. A research assistant from Polis University in Tirana said that in his experience he found it effective to involve community members with the initial work on projects in order to establish a sense of ownership. He gave the example of a past project of his where he worked to construct a playground within a town in Albania. He found that when he had the locals participate in constructing the playground it received less vandalism and abuse because those in the town had helped to build it and learned to respect it more. He believes that if members of Pellumbas are involved in the future work to develop Pellumbas' attractions then the community will have more ownership of what is built and established.

4.6 Funding

There is a concern for lack of funding for tourism initiatives at Pellumbas.

Many of the projects mentioned in our interviews require funding on some level. There is need for funding whether it be renting or buying a house in Pellumbas for lodging purposes, helping to establish a village market, fixing trails to the river and cave, or providing workers of the village with compensation for their services. The mayor of the commune reinforced the fact that funding is needed from outside sources. He feels that there are a couple options for this. He said that a private company could control the management of the tourism industry in Pellumbas or donors could give money to the tourism initiatives and the commune would manage the projects and funds. The mayor of the commune felt that having a private company fund and manage the tourism of the village would be best because there would be less changing of objectives when new mayors came into power for the commune. Ilir Hysa and his associate at the Outdoor Albania Association, Oltion Kadaifciu, also expressed interest in finding funding for this tourism initiative.

4.7 Visitors

Many visitors who explored the Pellumbas destination missed out on the full experience because of a lack of information about the area.

After interviewing several local tour guides, and visiting the village of Pellumbas as tourists ourselves, we concluded that the trip is difficult to accomplish without the help of a guide. This is because of a lack of information available about the Pellumbas area, both in preparing for the trip and when in the village. While researching the village and Cave of Pellumbas before arriving in Albania it was difficult to find information about these destinations. Searching for the cave on the Internet provided information posted by tourism companies, but not much about the details of the Pellumbas region. As a prospective tourist, it was confusing to not find much useable information about the destination. Once in the village of Pellumbas, it is difficult for visitors to obtain information about the area, especially if the visitor does not speak Albanian. The difficulty in communicating with the local villagers and business owners makes a visit to the village more problematic for foreign tourists.

After discussing the lack of visitor information with our liaison and local villagers, our liaison presented several potential solutions that could help to better inform visitors before arriving at Pellumbas. With more information available, potential visitors would be able to properly research the destination and learn about the full experience in the village of Pellumbas. Through discussions with Ilir Hysa, we decided that the creation of a website, a Facebook page, and an informational guide for the Pellumbas destination would be viable options to pursue. The Outdoor Albania Association previously had a website advertising the Cave of Pellumbas destination. According the former gatekeeper, when the website was active, there was a greater number of visitors calling tour guides and coordinating hikes to the cave. The website was only active for two years because the OAA intended for the village's local government to eventually take responsibility for the site. This transition never occurred and the OAA was not able to continue funding and updating the website. Since social media is currently very popular and a useful tool for marketing, the creation of a Facebook page would allow visitors to easily research the destination before visiting and may also help establish contacts between tour agencies and potential tourists.

Based on our experience and the comments from members of the Albania project center who hiked to the cave, it was frequently noted that many hikers were not prepared for the trek. Reasons for this unpreparedness included: not knowing the length or difficulty of the trail, being unaware that there was actually a hike in order to get to the cave, not bringing enough water, and not having the physical fitness for the venture. One proposal to help make the hike easier for tourists would be to provide information beforehand in order for visitors to better prepare themselves for the trip. One of the possibilities for providing this information that we discussed with our liaison is an informational guide including a trail map, information about the cave, a one day itinerary, and what to see in the area. Figure 16 is a photograph of members of the Albania project center during their hike to the Cave of Pellumbas.



Figure 16: Hikers on their way to the Cave of Pellumbas

5. Recommendations and Deliverables

5.1 Recommendations

The Cave of Pellumbas is a special tourism destination within the village of Pellumbas that shows great potential for attracting visitors. Our team collected data about this attraction through interviews, on-site visits, and available materials. The opinions we gathered helped to create a set of recommendations for the village to best use its natural resources and village culture to attract tourists. These recommendations include short term, project-based changes as well as how to improve the experience for visitors over the long term. We based our recommendations on feedback and information our team gathered during our time in Albania.

5.1.1 The Cave of Pellumbas

One of the most important objectives for making the Cave of Pellumbas a popular tourist destination is improving the path inside of the cave. As mentioned previously, there are several options for increasing the cave's accessibility for visitors. Based on the advantages and disadvantages chart located in the findings section, there is a choice between a short term solution and a long term solution. The short term solution implements a system of reflective tape or fluorescent paint that could subtly light the path inside of the cave in order to provide a clearer route. The long term solution would be the construction of a physical path, probably using walkways and handrails in some places. The recommended material for the footpath is wood, and either rope, metal, or wood for the handrails. This would allow for a much more obvious path through the Cave of Pellumbas.

The first recommendation is to determine the difference in cost between the two options. The tape or paint option would be less expensive, as it would only require a small quantity of either product. However, the problem with this idea is that our research leaves us unsure of the longevity of the material, especially in a cave that is constantly dripping water from the ceiling. Therefore, we recommend getting an estimate on the cost of constructing a path, mentioned as the second option. If an evaluation is performed on the cave, then the village and commune will be able to see how much it will cost to create an effective destination for all tourists, not just those brave enough to venture into the cave. If presented with a cost analysis, the funding for such a project may be attainable through the commune.

The improvement of the cave will assist in the development of the village of Pellumbas as a tourist destination. This recommendation is a first step, and it will be very helpful to accommodate all tourists who wish to explore the Cave of Pellumbas. With this objective, there are limitations that may slow the progression towards the final goal. We expect it will be very difficult to find an expert to give an estimate on this project which is located in rural Albania. One solution for minimizing the cost of this project would be to use villagers and village resources to eliminate the need for outside contracting. Another limitation that may hinder this project would be the transportation of materials to the cave. It

would be possible to transport materials using donkeys, but the process would make the project progress even slower. With all of these possible limitations, we also provide the suggestion that this project may take away from the natural beauty of the cave and the experience. We recommend the gathering of more thoughts and opinions before initiating the cave path project in order to assess the effect it could have on the tourist experience in the Cave of Pellumbas.

5.1.2 The Erzen River

The Pellumbas village and its surrounding area can serve as a full day adventure for tourists interested in a rural experience. Our team learned that the less-visited Erzen River is quite stunning, and visitors are missing out on a key attraction at Pellumbas. Ilir Hysa commented that tourists who do not visit the river are not “getting the full experience”. We designed our data collection and recommendations to highlight the river as a main attraction at Pellumbas, and to encourage visitors to add it as a must-see during their time in the village.

We recommend the advertising of the river in Pellumbas when promoting the village as a tourist destination. By only mentioning the cave in detail, tourists may get the preconceived idea that the village is a one dimensional destination and not worth spending a day to only visit a cave. By dually promoting these two amazing attractions, the destination can start to look more like a lengthy one day trip, and possibly attract more visitors.

5.1.3 The Trails

Our team’s recommendations for the Pellumbas hiking trails are to increase directional signage and to improve the quality of the trail. The improvement appeared as a common recommendation from many of the people interviewed. A map of the trails in the Pellumbas region is necessary in order to place signs at the most efficient locations, such as: splits in the trail, intersections, and sections where the trail is not immediately apparent to hikers. Information on each sign should aid hikers in deciding where to go. This means that signs should include information on where the trail leads, what the distance is to that destination, and the difficulty of the trail ahead. Painted marks along each trail can assure hikers that they are still on the correct path. These paint marks can be basic shapes (squares, circles, crosses, etc.) made on permanent features, such as trees, along the trail. Even though setting up proper signage is an essential step to further developing the trail system in Pellumbas, proper maintenance is critical for long term development. Site managers should maintain all the trails and signs in the area on a regular basis.

The destination must be able to appeal to a greater number of visitors. Since the current trail to, and along, the river is difficult to navigate at some locations, this section of the trail is mostly aimed at adventure tourists and experienced hikers. The overgrown plants and trees make some sections leading to the river nearly impassable, while the rocky lining of the river requires difficult maneuvers in certain locations. Our team recommends the development of the trail to the river in a similar fashion as the trail

to the cave. This includes widening the trail at narrow sections, clearing brush and branches from the trail, adding steps at steep sections, and providing handrails in dangerous areas. Constructing this well-developed trail would enable a greater number of visitors to enjoy the hike down to the river, and the beautiful views along the path. Our team believes that this basic development would not take away from the natural beauty of the area, but instead allow more visitors to experience the attractiveness of the area.

Because the river is located about an hour hike from the village, it is possible that there would be difficulty in transporting any materials to the river. We recommend that an outside organization, like the OAA, complete this project because they have experience in similar trail improvements. This way, the river can serve as a main attraction in Pellumbas and can help tourists obtain the “full experience” the village has to offer.

5.1.4 Village Infrastructure and Management

The management and accessibility of the village of Pellumbas are two areas that need improvement in order for Pellumbas to grow as a destination. Commune and village officials should consider incorporating local guides and managers into the destination for better organization. Local guides and managers will help to ensure that profits stay within the village of Pellumbas. The accessibility of the village is also crucial for the site’s success. The following recommendations improve the village infrastructure and management in Pellumbas.

We recommend that the Pellumbas region incorporate local guides into the destination. Trained local guides would provide visitors with a memorable experience. Knowledge of the historical and geographical significance of the Cave of Pellumbas, the Erzen River, and the village is an important part of the guides’ education. Training could also include education of local customs and archeological findings as well as local flora and fauna. Some of the guides should be able to speak English, or other languages, in order for them to better communicate with foreign visitors.

In order to train these guides the village and commune can bring in outside companies. For example, a guide whom we interviewed from Outdoor Albania received training through Explore, a tourism agency from the United Kingdom. The purpose of bringing in another company is to provide professional level training, ensuring guides know essential information to provide a well put together tour. We also recommend that there be site managers who can handle the daily operations at the destination. The job of a site manager would be similar to that previously done by the former gate keeper who used to collect an entrance fee and book tours. There should also be a manager available to maintain the trails. Maintenance would include cleaning the platform in front of the cave, inspecting the railings on a regular basis, clearing litter along the trail, and keeping the trail from becoming overgrown.

Previously, the former gate keeper was unable to remain employed because the commune did not make enough profit from the site. It is important to keep such limitations in mind when looking for local

site managers and guides. Our recommendation is that there would be three locals involved with the site, but to employ more as the number of tourists increase. In order to maintain the trails and the destinations, we recommend employing two local villagers. To occupy the trail entrance, collect fees, and assist visitors we recommend employing one site manager. We determined the number of employees after hearing the opinions of the former gatekeeper and our liaison, Ilir Hysa, both having experience working on the trails and at the attractions. Both individuals felt that two trail maintenance workers and one site manager were adequate for sustaining a well-organized destination.

To improve accessibility, the road to Pellumbas requires repair and clear directions. The road is steep and winding, and has giant potholes making it difficult for most cars to navigate. The potholes need repair and the road needs paving. Maintenance and repair will help to ensure accessibility to the village. We also recommend clear signage directing travelers to Pellumbas. This includes the repair of the broken sign showing the direction to Pellumbas as well as the addition of signs indicating where to turn from the main road. Once off the main road, the turns to Pellumbas are easy to miss, so improving signage would help increase accessibility. For now, it is important that driving directions are made available to potential Pellumbas visitors. The local government would manage these improvements; therefore, this aspect of accessibility would depend on the village's and commune's interest in completing this. If the commune's master plan is primarily focused on the overall betterment of its villages, then the commune may consider fixing the signs and the road.

The road to Pellumbas is in need of repair; however, road maintenance is an issue throughout all of Albania. There are limited resources designated to fixing the road to Pellumbas because many roads in the area require maintenance. The road to Pellumbas is the only access point to the village, so it is crucial that the road is repaired and maintained.

5.1.5 Villagers

From our research, we determined that villagers need a place to sell their goods. Tourists currently visit the cafés when they are in Pellumbas, and the owners have experience with selling goods. Therefore, villagers could sell their goods through the cafés. Villagers currently involved in tourism efforts, such as the café owners and the former gate keeper, can provide encouragement to convince villagers that selling their goods is a way to get involved in Pellumbas' tourism industry. Increased advertising about Pellumbas would help to attract visitors to buy goods from the village. Advertising with tourism companies, social media, websites, and brochures can help to achieve this. To increase interest, villagers could put on demonstrations on how they make goods such as olive oil, raki, wine, or cheese. If the efforts to sell goods are successful, the establishment of a market could be a future possibility.

Because of the lack of foreign language speaking locals in the village, our team recommends the involvement of the younger generation in tourism activities. Local children are beginning to learn English

in school, however most seek opportunities in Tirana for higher education and employment. If the younger generation of locals assumed roles such as greeting tourists upon arrival or translating for villagers, then residents would better prepare themselves to welcome foreign tourists. This would help to improve the current situation of tourism in Pellumbas, and would also make community based tourism efforts more sustainable for the future. Increased involvement could show local youth that there is opportunity for employment and economic benefits through tourism efforts in the village.

As suggested by our liaison, a cleanup day involving the local youth could help to initiate the maintenance of the destination. This would be a day where the village's children gather to help clean up litter along the trail to the cave, followed by a cookout for all the participants. It is an event that could help create a connection between the villagers and the destination, and give them a sense of responsibility for keeping the site clean. This recommendation is something to pursue in the future, possibly through the WPI Albania project site, as the next step in initiating community based tourism in Pellumbas.

Another project to pursue in the village of Pellumbas is the addition of lodging opportunities for visitors. Options for creating lodging include hosting of visitors by locals, renovating abandoned homes, or making a camping area in the village. Initiation is crucial for projects such as these. Having visitors camp out overnight in one of the many fields and open areas surrounding the village could be a way to establish Pellumbas as an overnight destination. It could also show locals that visitors would like the option of lodging at Pellumbas to fully experience the village and surrounding region. This would require guides that provide trips to Pellumbas to offer overnight camping excursions. The campsite would also require determining where in the area camping could take place. Camping or other lodging would help to establish the option of a two day trip to Pellumbas.

Individuals with tourism experience can speak with locals about their willingness to host visitors. A local currently involved in tourism, an outside organization, or tour guides could initiate this conversation, and, if interest arises, advertise this opportunity. Convincing locals to host visitors will be the most difficult piece of this particular effort because of the current lack of experience with the practice according to our liaison, Ilir Hysa. An outside organization or local volunteers could renovate an abandoned house. Funding is necessary for the purchase of a house and property within the village as well as for costs of renovations. The Outdoor Albania Association expressed interest in taking on such a project if they could find a source for funding. If built, this structure would need people to maintain and manage the building as well as its revenue. Advertising would help in the success and sustainability of this project. The initiation of these two projects requires first establishing Pellumbas as an overnight destination.

5.1.6 Funding

Establishing sources of funding for projects that enhance tourism in Pellumbas is imperative. Many of the initiatives recommended will require at least some amount of funding. These projects include trail creation, trail maintenance, establishment of lodging opportunities, creation of a market, infrastructure repair and maintenance, English lessons for villagers, payment of those who manage and work with tourism at Pellumbas, and cave conservation. All of these projects would need a detailed plan in order to request and receive funding.

5.1.7 Visitors

To develop Pellumbas as a tourist friendly destination, there must be more information available to prospective visitors. This includes information that hikers can obtain before arriving at the destination and once at Pellumbas. After discussing these recommendations with our liaison, our team suggested the creation of three different advertising and information avenues: a website, a Facebook page, and an informational guide. We decided that creating these different advertising materials would be an essential aspect of tourism development.

5.2 Deliverables

5.2.1 Pamphlet

To aid in the promotion of the village of Pellumbas and its surrounding region as a tourism destination, our team decided to create a pamphlet that acts as a tourism guide for Pellumbas. We collected data for this pamphlet through interviews and observations. The purpose of this pamphlet was to provide visitors with interesting, insightful information to enhance their experience at Pellumbas.

From our interviews with villagers and tour guides, we were able to identify people with knowledge about the cave and its past uses. This put us in contact with several professors who are a part of the Albanian Speleology Didactic Association and who participated in the original excavation and research on the cave. These professors were able to provide us with information about the Cave of Pellumbas regarding its history and the different archeological remains found in the cave. The history and significance of the cave will be very useful in informing and attracting visitors to the site through our tourism guide.

Our interviews with tour guides and villagers were also able to provide us with information regarding the Cave of Pellumbas' role in the village. This includes the past use of the cave by the villagers and local legends surrounding the Cave of Pellumbas. This gave an understanding of the significance of the cave as well as local traditions in the village. The information used in the guide captures the unique history of the cave, which can explain the cave's significance to tourists.

To highlight other aspects of the trip to Pellumbas, we included information about the Erzen River. We gave details regarding its natural beauty, the opportunity to go swimming, and what tourists can find in the village, such as local farmers, and two cafés for dining. We based this information off our own observations as well as recommendations from tour guides about the attractions at Pellumbas. In addition to this information, we created a one day agenda for the Pellumbas visit. This will help guide tourists through the different must-see's and opportunities at the destination. We included information about the area, photographs of different scenery, and nature items to look out for along the trail.

To produce large quantities of the pamphlet, we recommend obtaining sponsorships from tourism companies and guides. The pamphlet could advertise their logos and contact information for a set fee. These funds would help pay for the production of the pamphlet as well as give interested visitors information on guide services.

5.2.2 Facebook Page

Since social media is a popular and convenient form of communication, the creation of a Facebook page for the Cave of Pellumbas is an essential form of advertising. A Facebook page not only enables potential visitors to learn about the destination, but also allows for an interactive relationship between visitors, guides, tourism agencies and locals. To create a successful page for the Cave of Pellumbas, there were essential aspects that needed inclusion, such as: photographs of the area, directions to the destination, and information on the area. Initial setup of the Cave of Pellumbas page involved a description of the cave, river and village. The information displayed in the “About” and “Description” sections of the Facebook page are in Appendix M: “About” and “Description” from Cave of Pellumbas Facebook Page. The page also features photographs taken during our team’s trip to the cave, river and village. Screenshots of the Facebook page are in Appendix N: Screenshots from Cave of Pellumbas Facebook Page. Potential tourists can view and “like” the page at <https://www.facebook.com/PellumbasCave>. By including photographs, potential hikers can have a clearer idea of what to expect on their visit. Facebook also allows those who hiked the trail to upload their own photographs to share on the Cave of Pellumbas page. The Facebook information section includes a link to the Cave of Pellumbas website to give visitors the option to learn more about the destination.

5.2.3 Website

Included among the final deliverables is a website for the Pellumbas region. The purpose of the website is to help visitors make the most out of their trip to Pellumbas and provide some basic information on the area. We created the website through Weebly, a hosting site, which was free of charge. We designed the website using tools provided by Weebly. To design the website, we used information and photographs gathered from our trips to the village to make three sections concerning the Cave of

Pellumbas, the village of Pellumbas, and the Erzen River. There is also a section to help visitors plan their visit. This includes a one-day trip agenda, a must-see list, and how to get in contact with an agency to help plan a trip. There are also driving directions and a map to assist visitors in getting to the village. In order to prepare visitors for the hike, a section on what to bring to get the most out of the experience is included. On the website is an explanation of our team's project, a description of WPI's project plan, and the brochure. We designed the website for foreign visitors as it is currently in English. A future development of the website will be to provide all of the information in Albanian. Once finished, we submitted the website's URL to multiple Internet search engines so future visitors could easily look up information about Pellumbas. Screenshots of the website are in Appendix O: Screenshots from Cave of Pellumbas Website. Potential tourists can visit the website at <http://pellumbascave.weebly.com>.

5.3 Future Projects

One of the challenges we faced during this project was the underdevelopment of the Pellumbas destination. We see a great potential in the future development of Pellumbas and thought that WPI students could further contribute to the tourism initiatives. We recommended projects that could both have a significant impact at the destination and that would also be attainable during the typical IQP project duration.

We recommend a project dedicated to the creation of an educational program for students in the Tirana area based around the nature and history of the Pellumbas region.

There is a potential to both increase publicity of the Pellumbas region as well as utilize the nature and unique history of the area for educational purposes. WPI students could work with both the village of Pellumbas and schools within the Tirana area to develop an educational program around the Pellumbas region. Such a program could include information about the diverse nature of the area, the history and geology of the Cave of Pellumbas, cultural practices within the village, and lessons on responsible tourism practices. We suggest the following objectives be used to complete the project:

- Identify participating schools
- Develop suggestions for educational activities that could involve the younger villagers at Pellumbas
- Coordinate an on-site liaison who would be qualified to teach or guide the program
- Find funding that could support the project

This project could be beneficial to the Pellumbas community, grade school students of the Tirana area, and the WPI students participating. It could teach valuable first hand lessons to Albanian youth about the unique natural resources around them as well as about rural tourism as a growing industry. The

WPI students would gain an understanding of the importance of the rural tourism industry in Albania and would get the opportunity to interact with a variety of Albanians with many different backgrounds. It would also contribute to the aims of the Outdoor Albania Association if they were to continue as a sponsor.

We recommend a project dedicated to the development of a market where locals can sell their goods to visitors.

A WPI project team could work to further involve the community members of the village of Pellumbas in the tourism initiatives at Pellumbas. Increased involvement from the locals could help to further develop the site and allow more locals to benefit from tourism at Pellumbas. The creation of a market would provide locals an established and formal location to sell their goods. The project should involve the team working directly with locals by conducting interviews and gathering opinions about the project, while working with an outside liaison. We suggest the following objectives for the project:

- Coordinate locals who are willing to participate in selling goods at the market
- Find local representatives to oversee the logistics of the market
- Speak with town and commune officials about the regulation of revenue
- Make plans for the location of the market and determine if certain structures would need to be built

The project team would have to work to understand local opinions towards being involved in tourism and selling their goods that they produce.

We recommend a project dedicated to the improvement of signage and trail quality at Pellumbas, including a trail inside of the Cave.

As previously stated, the Outdoor Albania Association completed a project where they created a trail to the Cave of Pellumbas in 2009. Trails from the cave to the Erzen River, from the river to the village, and within the cave are much less established. A team of WPI students could work toward creating a plan for further developing the trail system at the Pellumbas site. They should also explore how to best involve the locals at Pellumbas in the project. We suggest the following objectives for the project:

- Determine proper trail building and maintenance techniques
- Find a group of volunteers from the village to help run the project
- Compile a list of necessary materials and the budget needed to undertake the project
- Determine the location of trail signs
- Make a new trail map of the area

The team of WPI students would help to initiate the development of Pellumbas as a tourism destination by completing this project. Collaboration with the villagers would also help to make the site more sustainable in future years.

We recommend a project dedicated to the development of a trailhead structure for the Pellumbas destination.

The village of Pellumbas lacks a reception area for its visitors. Those venturing to the village for tourism purposes mostly come with guides; however, those traveling without guides may have a difficult time finding their way to the beginning of the trail. A structure put in place could serve as an area where a local guide could greet those traveling to Pellumbas on their own, and it could create more possibilities for the development of the destination. The WPI students should address the management of an entrance or trailhead structure as well as its sustainability. We suggest the following objectives for the project:

- Determine the costs and materials needed for the structure's construction
- Create, or find, drawings or blueprints for the desired structure
- Coordinate locals to run the booth and oversee its logistics
- Determine what to offer at the booth and what to charge for admission
- Coordinate local volunteers to help construct the structure
- Find funding for the creation of the structure if necessary

The team of WPI students would help to benefit the tourism initiatives at Pellumbas. They would have to take into consideration the involvement of the Pellumbas community and the best practices for fully utilizing a trailhead structure for welcoming visitors.

6. Conclusions

We are able to draw conclusions regarding our approach to the problem of community based tourism in Albania. Community based tourism was the foundation for the tourism recommendations, the tourist informational guide, and the Pellumbas website and Facebook page. This chapter will summarize these findings and recommendations pertaining to the establishment and development of community based tourism in Pellumbas.

What we concluded as a general truth of the Pellumbas village and region is that it has many potential attractions and assets for tourism. In reflecting on the outcome of the project, it is interesting to imagine all of the possible directions for the project. Since our team was the first to work on this project, it often seemed as though the possibilities were endless, and at times it was overwhelming. We approached this problem by deciding to focus more on one single aspect of this plan, and provide recommendations for how to achieve other goals in the future. Our team was able to focus on what we could actually provide for this village.

We decided the single focal point of our project through our knowledge and the resources around us to determine the first step in engaging community based tourism in Pellumbas. To do this we consulted our liaisons, Ilir Hysa and Oltion Kadaifciu, to discuss all of the areas we identified as the most important for improvement within the village. The goal of the meeting was to understand their interest in these areas and to have them help determine the area in which our team could have the biggest impact. Based on our opinions and data collection, we determined that the best way to leave an immediate impact would be to initiate the advertising and promoting of Pellumbas through social media and the Internet.

Our team was very excited to have the opportunity to potentially make an impact on the community of Pellumbas and leave our mark in Albania. However, being the first WPI student group to travel to Albania, we were unaware of the practical difficulties that hindered progress on many of our objectives along the way. Therefore, we determined that concentrating on advertising and promoting the destination was a good way to lay the foundation for future tourism growth in the village, while also providing recommendations for future students and organizations who may work with the village of Pellumbas and its surrounding area. Additionally, the set of tourism recommendations, although less detailed, are seen as helpful for the continuation of this project in the coming years. This model for tourism improvement will provide common ground between the OAA, students, and researchers working on the project.

During our research, we realized that there are many similarities between community based tourism and the opportunities for tourism in the Pellumbas region. In community based tourism, the balance between tourists' needs, local culture, and the environment is vital. It is not until interacting with

the environment that one fully realizes the potential of natural beauties like the Cave of Pellumbas and the Erzen River. We saw the opportunity for community based tourism to not only showcase special, natural wonders but to involve the village in an initiative that would help spark economic growth.

When initiating community based tourism, one must take both logistical and social factors into consideration. We realized that there were many logistical details to address before beginning any projects. We also understand that the social change that would need to occur in the village would be the most difficult to initiate, and take the most time. Currently, most locals are not involved in tourism efforts, so building a new culture around contributing to, and maintaining, a rural tourism site will take time and effort from those who are involved in initiating the project. It is important to both preserve the traditions and cultures of the village as well as showcase it as a destination.

This community based tourism initiative carries a large array of implications. If the village of Pellumbas is successful in establishing itself as a tourism destination, and the locals can help to contribute, maintain, and manage the site, then it can become an example for other small villages across Albania. Albania's 2008 sector strategy recognizes rural tourism in Albania as a new direction for the tourism industry and that it would help to establish economic growth in rural areas within the country. Also, the village of Pellumbas will be able to profit from community based tourism if locals who manage the area receive compensation, and if villagers can sell goods to tourists. The Cave of Pellumbas and surrounding area can have a greater likelihood of being protected if the tourism in the region were to blossom. The cave is a natural and historic treasure, but the only guarantee in preserving it is to enforce protection of the surrounding area.

Moving forward with this initiative, the most important aspects to pursue will be promoting community involvement in the tourist destination, establishing a sense of ownership among the community members towards the cave, river, and trails, and developing the site so that it is more usable and accessible to visitors. The first two aspects will require interactions with locals and will help the village to self-sustain the site in the future. This will also ensure that benefits and profits from the destination will stay inside the village. The final aspect of further developing the site will help to attract more visitors and prepare the village to accept them as well. Overall these initiatives will help to establish community based tourism at the village of Pellumbas and the surrounding region.

Our group came out of this project with a valuable cultural experience. We were able to learn what makes Albania and its people so unique through our many interviews, observations, and conversations. We learned the degrees of social change and the many aspects that are important to consider when working on a project that involves people and their livelihood. Such an experience will serve us well in our future careers as engineers. We hope that our findings and recommendations will

make an impact on the village of Pellumbas and give it the attention it deserves, so that it may prosper in community based tourism.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Outdoor Albania Association Mission

Mission: The Outdoor Albania Association seeks to promote conscientious tourism throughout Albania. They seek to do this through meaningful projects throughout the country.

The Outdoor Albania Association is a nonprofit organization founded in Tirana on October 28th, 2005. The Outdoor Albania Association (OAA) was founded with the purpose to develop responsible tourism in Albania while preserving its diverse nature, rich culture, and ancient traditions. Those at the OAA feel that Albania has “outstanding capacities to attract visitors” (“Outdoor Albania Association,” n.d.) and see it as a goal to improve access to remote and picturesque areas. The OAA also believes in working directly with local communities and involving them in their projects. To complete their projects, the OAA trains locals to sustain tourism spots while keeping conservation management and sustainability in mind.

There are four leading members at the OAA. Gent Mati is the Head of Association and a project initiator. Laura Payne is the Administrator and Director of Communication. Celeste Goncalves is the web and visual designer, a project initiator, fund raiser and project writer. Ilir Hysa is a project manager, project initiator, fund raiser, project writer and is our contact for the project. The Netherlands Embassy in Albania has provided funding for many of the projects the OAA has undertaken. The remainder of the organization is made up of community members and volunteers. (“Outdoor Albania Association,” n.d.)

As a not-for-profit organization, the Outdoor Albania Association produced many successful projects throughout the country of Albania. Specifically to the Cave of Pellumbas, the group has turned a near death trap of a hiking trail into a comfortably wide, easily accessible trail. Their group maintains a Facebook page, on which they update project statuses with many photographs and descriptions of their work.

In the summer of 2009, the OAA completed work on the Cave of Pellumbas, located just outside the city of Tirana. The cave houses some very rare archeological artifacts, including skeletons of Cave Bears and ancient human remains. Originally the path to the cave was very dangerous at several points; with narrow pathways on a steep hillside. The OAA created a much safer trail and made the hike much more accessible to visitors by adding signs and information plates. (“Outdoor Albania Association,” n.d.)

Several of the projects the OAA have completed involved increasing tourism in Vuno, a small village located on the Albanian Riviera. The OAA began by renovating Shkolla Vuno, also known as the School of Vuno. This involved installing running water and electricity, as well as modernizing the

bathrooms, walls and floor. Previously, the school was a wreck, with garbage around the school and areas within classrooms torn apart. Before and after photographs are shown in Figure 16. (“Outdoor Albania Association,” n.d.) However, due to the small size of the village, the school closed and turned into a hostel soon after it reopened. (“Tirana Backpacker,” n.d.)



Figure 17: Before (left) and after (right) of the bathrooms at Shkolla Vuno.

Following the school, the OAA went to work on the Church of Saint Mary. Believed to be built in the early 1700’s, the church is one of the oldest on the Ionian coast and frescoes, murals painted onto fresh plaster with watercolors, adorn its walls. (“Outdoor Albania Association,” n.d.) Although it had the potential to be a tourist destination, the church lacked a direct path and was virtually unknown by outsiders. Structurally, the roof was in poor condition and leaks in the roof caused damage to the frescoes. The OAA cleared the path to the church and restored the roof.

The next project in Vuno involved cleaning up the village to make it tourist friendly. Many of Vuno’s residents moved to cities and other countries, and abandoned their houses in the process. The streets and empty houses filled with garbage and debris which volunteers cleaned up. They also developed paths to the beaches and other destinations. With information and directions not readily available, the OAA created brochures and distributed them in cities. (“Outdoor Albania Association,” n.d.) Combining the work the OAA completed and the village’s close proximity to the beaches, Vuno is growing to be a popular tourist destination.

One project that the organization supervised is promoting bicycle tourism in Northwestern Albania. This project was intended to give foreign bikers guidance on the best routes to explore Northwestern Albania that showcase the country’s unique culture and beautiful landscapes. The routes range from the capital city of Tirana to a bit beyond the city of Shkodra (Northwestern border of Albania). (“Outdoor Albania Association,” n.d.)

According to their official website (www.outdooralbania-association.com) they have these six major projects ongoing around the country. With a seemingly widespread effect on the growth of Albanian tourism, it is hard to believe that their Facebook page contains a mere 167 followers (as of September 2, 2013). (“Facebook | outdoor,” 2011) It is obvious that this association struggles with a lack of publicity, and we noticed a very large gap between the work completed and those who have noticed.

In order to obtain a more well-rounded opinion of the OAA, we sought additional sources other than their own website. As previously discussed, the OAA is extremely underpublicized. Given the fact that the OAA is nonprofit, it is difficult to find many reviews of their work online. The OAA may be overlooked in their ventures because, due to a growing economy, many Albanians may not be as focused on the increase of tourism. One website focused on exposing recent college graduates to job openings worldwide holds the OAA in very high regards as a nonprofit association. In the website’s description they describe the OAA as a friendly, teamwork oriented group of individuals who have intentions of developing “responsible tourism” while maintaining “a clear commitment to preserve and protect [their] most valuable natural and cultural assets.” (Nonprofit (Tirana): Outdoor,” 2010) Looking at this association from an outside perspective gives us a confident feeling that this is a hardworking, honest group of Albanian pioneers that can really make a difference in this country’s struggle to break through the economic barrier.

Appendix B: Initial Sponsor Interview with Ilir Hysa and Oltion Kadaifciu

About the Outdoor Albania Association (OAA):

- Started in 2005
- Idea of Gent (Mati)
- In 2008, Shkolla Vuno initiative was started.
- This made organization come alive. (No longer “illegal” organization?)
- 3 other projects from 2008
 - Ongoing project, Shkolla Vuno, also a hostel. Self-sustaining project.
 - Same w/ Cave of Pellumbas, generated money however it was going to munc.
- Wants to make an organized park that can generate income
 - Employ rangers, etc.
 - Generate small businesses,
 - Water “games” in river (kayaking or something along those lines maybe)
 - Start first “Adventure Park” in Albania
 - Business plan

About the village of Pellumbas:

- 20 km from Tirana
- Needs transformation
- Not very developed
- People living on basic → farmers
- Don’t generate money, living off the land
- Infrastructure not very good
- Road destroyed, now under construction
- Destroying mountain from other side
- 2 small businesses (cafes)
 - One large, one small.
 - Works a lot of weddings
- Olive trees → olive oil

River/Surrounding area

- River and cave
- Mountain: needs trails/signs
- Beginning of river, there is a dam, other side is lake. No one there to upkeep
- “the area is beautiful”
- Make leaflets/books (field guides?) medical herbs, creatures, bats
- How many visitors can enter a day without disturbing the environment
- Educational programs → get children to learn about environment and wildlife
- Abandoned houses not in use. Buildings getting finished. Potentially people can stay there? (Turn these into bed and breakfasts/hostels?)
- Villagers don’t like to share houses/resources without payment it seems

Attitudes of Villagers

- Welcoming? Yes.
- Younger guys give tours
- They're aware of assets
- Myths and realities
- Good potential for park
- Ethics are important to consider
- Collaboration with village?
- Community is key
- From what they've seen supportive

Logistics:

- How money will go to commune?
- Check legislation
- Ticket money was going to municipality, not park
- If they're generating money, make sure it goes back to park and village
- There are different villages around the area
- Ilir has ideas but hasn't started project but has ideas
- Manage
- Cleaning up garbage
- Someone to work permanently?
 - Ranger
 - Guide
 - Invite volunteers to work at park (maybe students)
 - Start small don't have money
- Commune can't manage as public property
 - Does not have legal space to do this
- More business thinking enterprises
- How this will work long term
- Also to test, proper space, and devotion

Appendix C: Initial Meeting with Oltion Kadaifciu

Background on Oltion

- Has worked with the OAA ever since their first project
 - Mostly for translations and writing project reports
- Previously worked at the Krystal University teaching research
- Currently works for Albanian Development Funds
 - NGO
 - Engaged in infrastructure projects
 - Created from the government with the World Bank
 - Well recognized company
- Works in the resources center
 - Offers training
 - Development specialist
 - Manages social aspects and financing

Not the best time to begin this project

- Thinks we are only months or years away from government reform
 - Reforming the structure of the commune: making them larger
 - Currently divided into communes (around 500 of them)
 - In future there will only be 100
- Improper documentation of property ownership
 - Commune owns property of the village, cave and surrounding area
 - This has not been properly documented (in archives)
 - Needs documents to show who owns the property
- In order to complete our project we must have proper documentation
 - Local properties must have proper documentation in order to propose improvements to the property

Government is requiring communes to create a development

- Includes the vision for the next 5 years
- Designate property use

Says to assess what is in the village:

- Pay attention to perception and reality
- People buying vacation villas in the village may skew the perception of what is actually in the village
- May appear better off than it actually is

Development in a sustainable way

- Keeping the character while developing
- Have consideration for how the new construction will look
- Things must be well thought out:
 - Make sure there is enough money so that buildings do not stay unfinished
- There is a planning problem where there is no approved planning process
 - If there is a planning process it is not respected

Be sure to mention possible risks when writing project report

Embassies and private sponsors understand that perfect documentation would not be necessary to complete the project

Problems mentioned above are not necessarily a concern with this project

Try to start small:

- If villagers see that there are improvements then they will be more likely to participate with project planning and organizing papers
- When they built the trail the OAA had permission from municipalities saying that they had the support from the community

Expecting improvements from the new government

- Optimistic about new government

Tirana has lost a lot of beauty from the construction of new buildings

Requests from the OAA

- The OAA doesn't have a clear idea about the project
- Definitely wants to develop the park
- If ran by the OAA how will the money be put back in the community
- Wants to create a management plan where the OAA can either lead or act as a resource

Appendix D: Interview Questions and Visitor Questionnaire

D.1 Visitor Questionnaire

1. What did you think of...
 - a. The village?
 - b. The trail?
 - c. The cave?
 - d. The river?
 - e. The cafes?
2. How did you hear about the Cave of Pellumbas?
3. Would you recommend this trip to a friend?
4. How could your experience have been improved?

D.2 Town Leader Interview Questions

1. What is the interest of the village in terms of tourism?
2. What resources in the village do you feel could be used for tourism efforts such as natural attractions, specialized skills of individuals, or farming?
3. What makes the village special to you?
4. Are there any traditions or cultures that are unique to you village?
5. How do you feel people would respond to participating in tourism efforts such as selling produce or guiding tours to the cave?
6. Do you know of anyone specifically who would be interested in participating in the tourism initiative?
7. What are some of the day to day activities of the people of the village?
8. How does your local government work both within the village and within the commune?
9. How is currency used in the village?
10. How do you feel the village can be improved?
11. What is your vision for the village and Cave of Pellumbas as a tourist site?

D.3 Tour Guide Interview Questions

1. What type of training have you received to become a tour guide?
2. In your own opinion what types of skills make a good tour guide?
3. What do you feel is the level of success of the Cave of Pellumbas as a tourist destination?
4. Which areas of the site in general do you see room for improvement?
 - a. What else could the site provide for tourists

5. Does the Cave of Pellumbas site compare to any other destinations that you have given tours to?
If so which ones and what were they like?
 - a. What were some good examples of tourism successes in those sites
 - b. Do you feel the Cave of Pellumbas destination could use some of these examples to improve?
6. What feedback did you receive from tourists about the site? (good and bad)

D.4 Interview Questions for Villagers

1. How has tourism within Pellumbas affected you?
2. Thoughts on tourism at Pellumbas?
3. Who benefits most from tourism now? Who would you like to see benefit from tourism in the future?
4. Are you interested in being involved in tourism? How do you feel you could contribute to tourism?
 - a. What would you need to begin doing such things?
5. What is your typical day to day routine here in the village?
6. What history, culture and traditions are special to you and how do they relate to the cave or village?

D.5 Speleology Society Member Interview Questions

1. You mentioned a project, who or what group is it through?
2. What has this project involved?
3. What have some of your findings been thus far?
4. What does the future of your project look like? What will you be doing in the near future?
5. Information about the cave:
 - a. Geology
 - b. Archeology
 - c. History
 - d. Cultural significance/legends
6. What is it that makes the cave special and unique?
7. Do you know any geological significance or information about the river or canyon?

Appendix E: Responses from Visitor Questionnaire

1) What did you think of...

a. The village?

It is a very nice place. It does not really have much to do there, but the café was nice. A big thing would be to improve the access to the village. Also, I noticed that the houses are kinda spread apart as they are in a hill, which can sometimes be inconvenient.

It was poor as was expected. Getting there was a bit "bumpy" but it was fine since I wasn't driving.

It was secluded, but it seems as though they are able to function well as a village. They had a lot of animals (goats, chickens etc.) The houses were small and seemed to be a bit run-down but it was a very pretty place to be. The roads for accessing the village seemed to be extremely difficult to travel on and I think that might pose a problem for tourists (like Americans) that are not used to driving on tough terrain.

I did not really notice the village on my way to the cave. I think it is important to interview the people from the village about their view of the cave and the tourism.

More advanced than I was expecting but littered with trash. Definitely needs a cleanup.

Very tiny. The roads leading to it could definitely use some work to make it more accessible. And yet maybe the bumpy roads are part of the experience of going?

The village was a very nice, typical Albanian village. I think they would love having visitors more often so that they can have economic benefits. If more restaurants and bars opened, the condition of the village would only get better, allowing space for more tourists to visit it. Also, it would be great if it had more directions to the cave.

-pretty interesting, it was definitely different -advertise ways for people of getting there (how would people possibly know, it seems so random) -smart that they are trying to clean it and the café was a great touch

b. The trail?

It was very nice and pretty straight forward. I feel like there is no way of getting lost. However, some more signs would definitely be nice and maybe fixing some areas of rest so that people can bring their own lunch and maybe sit down to have a picnic or something. I know something that is cool is putting like those stands where they write information and put pictures about certain mountains you can see from where you're standing, a specific flower or plant that you find in the trail, a type of rock, etc. This makes the hike more interactive and interesting and it can be more informational.

The trail was so much fun. As a person who is accident prone I did not feel like I was in too much danger walking along the path. There were sections where I think a railing would be useful, but for the most part I did not feel that unsafe. The smaller rocks are difficult to walk on as they slide around under your feet and sometimes a bad step made me slightly nervous. I think it was a strenuous hike, but nothing that is unmanageable. I think it would be important to tell tourists that it is a difficult hike for people who are not in good shape. (I know I was a little nervous for PC and I know the girl from England was a bit out of breath and was complaining about it) We went on a cooler day, but on a hot day (summertime) it would be very important to warn tourists to bring lots of water and to beware if you cannot handle a lot of physical activity.

I am a beginner hiker so I encountered problems with some parts of the trail. I think it would be great if some of the small rocks can be removed from the trail. Additionally, if some fences can be added below the hand rails that would be great because I think people can fall down under the hand rails.

Amazing. The work done to add stairs, railings, and the platform at the cave was very well done and makes the cave slightly easier to access. Maybe redo trail signs to make them bigger and more obvious.

The trail was adventurous, but definitely needs improvements. It would be very difficult to walk through in rain or snow. It's not a long hike, but it can still be a factor in people deciding not to walk to the cave. It is also not very old-people friendly. Even in great weather PC had a really difficult time hiking up and down, can't imagine how bad it would be for other old people who are not as vital as him. If it gets improved, it would be a great bonus!

-advertise it more as a trail!!!! Not just a cave. I enjoyed the trail as much if not more than the cave - make it more easily accessible -let people know that there is a guide and how to contact him, people might go and not know that they can have help getting to the top -scary during some parts! -getting to the trail should be more of a trail too, how would people know how to get up there because there were few signs and it was all dirt

There were good and bad spots. Although I never felt like I was in danger of falling. The bad spots just were harder to go up (or down) than others. But maybe I'm just not a good hiker.

A long hike definitely, but the steps were very helpful. The trail had awesome views of the country. This part should totally be advertised because it was just as good as the caves.

c. The cave?

The cave was great but I think it was hard to see what was inside with the head lamp we used. It would be helpful to know where we should stop and look at some great natural creatures in the cave. When you advertise the trip to the cave, it is important to show why the cave is great and what things are worth to visit in the cave.

Perfect. Nothing should be done to the cave (don't put lights in cave in my opinion, just use headlamps)

The cave was really cool! I enjoyed our walk inside. We all hate mud but you can't really change or do anything about it, unless the country regulations allow building a path and installing lights inside the cave. I've visited a cave in Kosovo and it had the path and the lights installed, making it pretty easy to walk. It was definitely something that people would enjoy.

-the minute of silence was a humbling experience, definitely the best part of the trip -hard to see even with headlamps -warn visitors that it will be slippery!

Incredible. Very cool to be able to go into it. The ritual at the end was great and really a nice experience.

Pretty cool, maybe should have a suggested path, maybe a map of the cave outside of it. I would have been afraid to go in without a guide.

The cave was awesome! Warn people to bring shoes that they do not care about as the mud was gross! The bats were interesting, and I was surprised that they didn't bother us. I thought they might have been mad that we were trespassing in their home. Headlights are ESSENTIAL, and I think going in a big group was comforting especially since I hate dark places. I think it would be important to have tour guides direct people in and out of the cave especially since many places were slippery.

Awesome!! Perhaps doing a path for the people to walk on (I know it is hard to do in the dark) would make it safer for people who want to visit it. Again, putting some stands with info and pictures on the outside maybe, can help people get information on how old is the cave, types of bats, depth, etc. for people who go without a tour guide).

d. The river?

We didn't really get to see it up close, but from far away it was pretty. I think a more accessible route down to the river would be important and fun! Especially on hot summer days! I would have like to go swimming in it!

Idk, looked nice

Didn't really get a close enough look at it. Although the way your sponsor was talking made it seem like it was very accessible from the cave.

-looks nice -advertise more, but make people aware of how difficult it is to get there (WSSAA sponsor walked to it and they couldn't find their way back so they walked all the way back up to the entrance of the cave)

The river looked really beautiful from distance, but I can't imagine what the path from the cave to the river looks like. It was general view of the river and the valley was really beautiful, I believe that most people would love it.

From a distance looked very nice. Would like to get a closer look.

I did not see the river.

e. The cafes?

The food was really good especially the soup. Maybe local vendors can sell some merchandise in or near the café.

(café you mean? Didn't see multiple) Great food and service. We did not have to pay so no comment on price because we didn't see it.

The cafes were just fine. I didn't really expect anything better considering how tourism in the village is not developed. Once the village has more tourists, the cafes definitely need to improve, and new ones need to be opened.

-great food and service! -the waiter was very kind -wonderful end to the hike

The café served good food and fresh food! Overall good experience.

Way better than I thought, could use some signage

The one we went to was delicious! I loved all the food we were served and I think that would be a good place for hikers to stop for lunch! I don't know how much we spent on food, but I'm sure it was cheap as is most places we have gone to.

The food was delicious and a good variety. I think they just need to work on maybe doing it more appealing and I believe that 2 cafes should be enough for the size of the village. Perhaps looking into a hostel or other businesses that could be there would be nice.

2) How did you hear about the Cave of Pellumbas?

From the project! :)

Through IQP

You guys

I was walking on the streets of Tirana when I overheard two Dutch travelers discussing this fantastic cave. Or maybe I just heard it from you guys.

-PC

The first time I heard of the Cave of Pellumbas was when we had to choose the projects we would like to be working on. I hadn't heard about it before.

A little birdie told me

The poster in the hostel.

3) Would you recommend this trip to a friend?

Yes. It is a fun trip.

Yes, it was a great experience

I would definitely recommend this trip to a friend! The view was awesome, the hike was of perfect length and the cave was really interesting. I trip to the cave is a day well spent!

-of course, but only if they are already interested in hiking (not very tough, but not a walk in the park)

I would certainly do that.

Yes, if they don't mind hiking

I think it depends on my friend. I would recommend it to a friend that is outdoorsy/athletic, but I would probably not recommend it to some of my other friends.

It is a great experience and a beautiful view. If there were more things to do, I would definitely make it a weekend trip and even come back if possible.

4) How could your experience have been improved?

Toilet paper in the bathrooms at the café, more railings on the trails, potentially more boards in the cave so it is not as slippery, being able to go swimming in the river!

Going to the river :(

More information ahead of time

Not sure if it is accessible or possible, but more information on the archeological things that were/are present. The bodies aren't there obviously but maybe just a sign about them? Maybe that sign did say that but I couldn't read it.

-I can't think of anything other than visiting the lake -our tour and tour guide were great and so was the café -beautiful views

The experience would be even better if the trail was a bit better. I know Outdoor Albania worked a lot to make it easier for people to walk through, but once more tourists arrive they'll have to make the trail more friendly to old people.

Only major improvements are access road, trash in village, and trail signs.

Maybe a trail with less small rocks?

Personal questions:

What if people get attacked by the bat in the cave? (Just in case, you never know what can happen in life)

I know it is impossible to build a bathroom on the way to the cave, but is there anything you can do to make it better?

Appendix F: Village Leader Interview

What is the interest of the village in terms of tourism?

- Can't say about most of the villagers
- Most of the people who would be interested run the businesses or are directly involved
- Tour guides:
 - Local guides: often charge too much
 - Most visitors come with a guide; some do ask for a local guide but this is difficult because oftentimes they don't speak much English

What would be the potential for visitors to sell handicrafts or other skills?

- If more visitors pass by, the more the villagers will want to participate and organize selling things
- Currently the villagers producing things but they don't sell them

People we should talk to:

- Mayor of the Commune
- The former gatekeeper
 - Wants to be active with the park, but there is a language barrier
- Women in the village do handicraft work
 - Talk to see if they would be willing to sell them
- If the result of selling products is earning more money people will be more willing to participate

Keeping money in the Commune

- Something to discuss with the mayor of the commune
- Entrance fee was not enough to keep the gatekeeper employed

Risks:

- The more invested with the project, the more the villagers will expand into the park
 - For profit the villagers might start to clear land within the park
 - Must find a way to control this from happening
- Currently the head of the commune is in opposition to the current government party and therefore is not being very active
- Mentioned that the forest police are in place
 - Mentions that they are not very effective
 - Shows up, drinks 2-3 raki, and says do whatever you want
- Problem with property ownership is that people do not respect what's theirs and what's others
- Possibly causing erosion from villagers building things illegally

(Mentioned these risks several times during the interview, obviously a big concern for him)

Vision for the Village:

- Infrastructure and roads need to be improved:
 - Especially the road
- Water pipes and drinking water access needs to be centralized and improved
 - Currently villagers get water from whatever source they can: digging well, tapping into random pipes
- Education is very important for the village
 - Villagers still throwing garbage in the woods and on the trail

Vision for the Cave:

- Sees the river as a big potential tourist attraction
 - Could be more developed with a nicer path
 - Thinks this river area is the most important to develop

Developing the River Area:

- Currently used for planting
 - Ilir possibly envisions an “open bar”?
 - People who currently own this area are not interested in developing it themselves but would possibly be more interested in selling it
 - Ilir was not concerned that building in the area would be a problem
- Possibly look at the mountain above the cave
 - Path is currently grown in but could be an option

Significance of the Cave

- Historically: during wars in the Ottoman era
 - Villagers used the cave to hide in
- Otherwise it was used by shepherds
 - Mostly kept a secret by the villagers
- Nowadays the village is not concerned with keeping the cave a secret
- There is also another tunnel built within the village
 - Villagers used this “bunker” as a hiding place instead of the cave
 - 30-50 meters deep
 - When mayor was a kid they would train to go to the cave in case of emergency

Would the mayor be interested in participating with this project?

- Says yes he would be willing to help
- This is being done for the village and he would like to be involved

What does he think of a community meeting regarding tourism?

- The community used to do something like this, but now there is little participation
- Mostly younger people in the village

Increasing participation?

- If they see the benefits then they’ll be more likely to participate

What does he suggest as our first step?

- Fixing the road to the village

Appendix G: Commune Leader Interview

Where does he see the development of the village?

- There is a master plan for the area that has already been approved
 - Protects the cave and considers it a high value destination
 - Path has to be improved
 - Make the path wider for visitors
 - Everything has been well thought out and approved by the commune
 - Includes resting places
 - Toilets to integrate into the landscape
 - Good viewpoints for pictures
 - Install path inside of the cave; this must be done by a specialist so as not to damage anything
- Improvements to the village/cave area:
 - Repair village roads with cobblestone
 - Make shops to sell goods
 - Regular bus to bring goods to Tirana
 - Tourist information with trained guide
 - Thought about making hiking tours with horses and donkeys

Asked about risk mentioned by Village Mayor (illegal forestry)

- This will be illegal and anyone who does this will be penalized

Says the master plan must happen with donors

- Needs funding from outside sources
 - Cave is a natural monument and belongs to everyone in the area
 - Which means the money will go to the commune and not specifically the village
- The village receives its benefits by receiving new infrastructure

Most important thing is to find funding

- Two ways for funding:
 - Private: takes control of the management of the tourist destination
 - Donors: give money to the village and the commune manages it
- Suggests the private funding would be the most helpful
- More consistent with their goals: says that he is interested in the project, but the next mayor may not be; causing the destination to suffer
- More invested in the project

Would a private company employ villagers?

- They typically would not be obliged to employ villagers
- But it is usually in the best interest of the project to do so
- It is much harder to integrate outsiders to the project

Master Plan:

Will we be able to see it?

- Plan shows the zoning of the area
- Approved build areas
- Needs specialists to come develop each zone
- Will provide zoning plan

What participation can we have with the project?

- Look for funding

Appendix H: Outdoor Albania Tour Guide Interview

Basic information about the cave:

- One of the oldest in the Balkan region
- Around 300m in length
- Unique fossils and cave bears
- Good location for tours:
 - Near Tirana
 - Offers a unique experience
- The prehistoric cave bears are unique to the area

About:

- Does hiking, cultural, and rafting tours
- Works for Outdoor Albania
- Originally worked for Explorer and received training from there

Suggested Improvements:

- Not everyone who visits the cave is not fit enough to explore it. Since this is the main focal point of the visit it is an important issue to address.
 - Provide equipment for visitors: headlamps, hardhats, guides
 - Create better setup within the cave itself:
 - Signs that provide information about the cave: history, stalactites, stalagmites, folk lore, info on bats species
 - Signs or posts that better mark the way around the cave. Even though it is a fairly open cave, it is still a bit confusing to navigate
- The road leading to the village is very rough and would need to be improved to allow more visitors

Other examples to compare to Pellumbas:

- Cave Rahudema in Kosovo: Here visitors pay admission fee and a headlamp, hardhat, and tour guide are included
- Spring of Rigim: one of the most unexplored caves in the country
- Voskopoja: an important city in the 18th century
- Theth: Originally a village like Pellumbas. Described how tourism suddenly boomed:
 - Civil war in Albania, deterred visitors because of safety concerns
 - After things settled, Albania began to attract adventure tourists. Mostly backpackers looking for a rustic destination who were not concerned with safety.
 - Once these backpackers began to visit and realize that the safety in the country had improved more people began to visit; including families, and less adventure oriented people
 - It is typical of Albanians to welcome strangers into their homes free of payment
 - As more tourists began to frequent these rural destinations and were willing to pay their hosts, villagers began to accept and more room for more tourists (mutual gain for families and tourists)
 - Eventually villagers moved out of their homes into smaller houses. Turning their homes into day houses for visitors
- Prespa: small village about 3.5 hours away from Tirana
 - Demonstrates exactly where the past meets the future
 - Gave example of a woman walking with a donkey while talking on a cell phone

Possibly ways to include/benefit the community:

- Tell tourists to not buy food in Tirana, but instead utilize the local market while in Pellumbas
- Have locals sponsor parking spaces
 - Tourists can have a safe place to park their car and pay local villager a few dollars to do so
- Use local transportation to get to the village instead of taking own car
- Set up school excursions to the cave
- Hire local guides (*Really liked the idea of hiring outside companies to train locals*)

Opinions of previous tourists:

- Thought it was a beautiful and unique experience
- He thought that tourists were not completely honest with giving negative opinions.
 - Did not feel comfortable voicing opinions that may be taken as offensive

Appendix I: High Albania Mountain Club Tour Guide Interview

His background:

- Founded High Albania (a mountaineering club)
 - Worked on a new way for tourism where the people pay for their experience and not the government
 - Attempting to change the current norm of vacation planned for the city; people generally liked to get away from the mountains instead of visiting them
 - Not a membership club, people can come and go and choose the activities that interest them
 - Less expensive than surrounding tourism agencies
 - Mostly trekking

Pellumbas Cave

- Before 2009, the hike to the cave was a difficult climb (then the OAA fixed it up)
- High Albania's first trip was to the Cave of Pellumbas
- Thinks that the platform was a bad idea, since it gave people a spot to throw their trash (lots of trash underneath the platform)
 - Liked the railing and stairs
- Thinks it is important to maintain the authenticity of the area
- Platform takes away from the beauty of the area and entrance
- When he gives tours he typically does a barbecue somewhere along route
 - Not at the cave because of the smoke
 - Brings meatballs, bread, cheese

Possible Improvements

- Few points in the railing need fixing
- The trail inside of the cave is unclear to visitors
- Info about stalagmites/tites: sometimes there is not enough water and a layer of the 'tites forms with just dust. If someone were to grab onto one, it would easily break apart at that layer
 - Breaking 'tites is essentially a crime... millions of years to grow back
 - Add sign that tell visitors to not touch
- Visitors should follow a specific trail:
 - Follow left side of cave: easier to navigate, can use wall as support
 - Use reflective signs to map cave
- Excavations:
 - Found evidence of tools and ancient remains
- If a large group visits the cave there is often not enough head lamps for everyone in the group: more supplies necessary
- Village should be education: about leaving trash, how to approach tourists (current mindset is not about selling things to visitors; accepting money)
 - "The world will not change by European opinion but by example"
 - Offer the village an example of how to do things

Visitors and Aims for Sustainable Tourism:

- Area of Pellumbas has something special that should be maintained. Village has potential
- Need to start with educating the locals on what they have to offer: sell handicrafts, produce, and fresh chicken/cheese
- More tourists = more income for the village

- Bed and Breakfasts?
 - Would be difficult to attract Albanians, possibly for foreigners and more likely in the future
 - Tourists often like to stay in authentic houses rather than large hotels
- Mostly visitors only leave food at the entrance and at the café's, more people would buy things if they were available
- Visitors typically attracted to lunch and food
- Typical tourism trip: Walk around for 30-60min, eat something, go dancing, and go home. Believes this is not tourism; it is people checking boxes (been there, did that) and not having an experience.
 - Shift focus away from food and towards the mountains the villagers

Surrounding Area:

- Visiting the cave, river, and canyon in one day is a large amount of things to do in one day
- Land in village is owned by the commune; no one buys it they just build on it
- Albanian Alps are mostly limestone: has grey, white and red (mostly grey)
- Snakeskin pine
 - Working to protect this tree (UNESCO)
 - Important to locals: used for roofs, floors, bridges
 - Heart of the tree is red
 - Once it dries for a few years the tree turns grey and matches the color of the stone used for buildings
 - Tree is very unique to the area and a rare species
 - Now the wood is so expensive, villagers are beginning to copy the style of Kosovo which doesn't match the style of the village

View of foreigners:

- Believes that foreigners have a bit more influence than locals
 - They're respected because of their experience in their homeland
 - Was hiking and met an old man on the road on day with a group of foreigners and he said "If more people like them come, the more stuff we will do"
 - Thinks project will be more successful if initiated by foreigners

Mentioned that things are not progressing in a group, but instead is individualized progression without regard for overall community vision

Appendix J: Interview with Villagers

The villagers we interviewed included the former gate keeper (“GK”) and one of the café owners (“CO”).

GK: Villagers positive about developing

- Positive to make tourism in the village
- Hasn’t been taken seriously or invested in

Involvement

- Needs to be a trail inside the cave so people know where to go and because it is slippery inside of cave

More and more visitors coming:

- The OAA left 30 headlamps at the startup of their project
 - Most of them are now missing or broken

Villager Contribution?

- Villagers might be interested to sell but are not interesting in being the sellers themselves

Are there other people in the village who could give tours?

- **Iir:** The former gate keeper is currently working to get his job back

Tourists? Albanian vs. foreigners

- 40% foreigners - typically in the summertime with a tour group
- 60% Albanians – visit in the springtime when school groups are coming

More publicity

When there was a website funded by the OAA there were more calls from Tirana about visiting the cave

- Website only ran for 2 years
- Website was originally intended to be maintained by the commune but this didn’t happen

Advertising is the most important

GK used to guide small groups when there were large groups he added in other guides from the village

How does he see the government being involved in tourism?

- Doesn’t know much about funds distribution
- Commune used to pay him as a guide but there weren’t enough funds to even support one guide

Does he know of any products in the village?

- **Iir:** Raki making, produce from the village

Are there specific traditions that should be preserved in the village?

- Tradition to make jams and tomato sauce that could be sold
- Traditional baking
 - Place a coin inside pie/byrek and the person who gets the coin is lucky for the rest of the year Tradition occurs around May 5th
- Prepare raki
 - Artisans come around in the village yearly to fix raki tanks
- St. George day:
 - Sacrifice lamb on May 6th

- This is the shepherd's day when lambs are separated from their mother's milk and begin to eat grass and feed on their own
- Islamic holidays
 - Very good cooking
 - Kids go from door to door for cookies and food

Potential lodging:

- This is difficult because the mentality is not there
- If someone starts everyone will be invested
- Didn't really see this as something possible because of the mentality

The OAA plans on renting a house: possibly start some form of lodging

How does he feel about the OAA renting a house?

- There are lots of people from Tirana who buy land in the village
- Sees no problem with buying houses
- The OAA renting is possible
- One person from Tirana bought and home in the village and fixed up the road to his property
- Helps when people move in and invest in the village infrastructure

Guest houses?

CO:

- Lots of abandoned houses in the village but the owners don't want to give them to the OAA
- The owners don't see the benefit of long term renting
- Thinks it is a good idea to renovate old houses for guesthouses
- All about initiating it
- Best for someone outside to initiate it

How do visitors like the cafés? – CO

- Most visitors enjoy their stay
- Visitors want to know about the village but there is no one there to introduce the history and the village
- **Ilir:** mentions that the cafés have shops
- Already introduces and sells produce to visitors through a relative who speaks English (lets relative know when tour groups are coming so he can help out)
- Would be willing to sell produce, since he already has a shop

CO: Introduction to the village is most important

- Need to find a way to receive villagers but most struggle with English
- In 2-3 years there will be more young people who will be able to speak English and then there would be someone around to greet visitors

CO: Local high school

- The interest in English is getting higher in parents and students
- 13/14 year old nephew speaks English
- There is the problem that those who speak English and do well in school will want to leave and go to Tirana
- If there is something developed here, people will be more likely to stay

If there is more income it is preferred that money stays in the village

Possible people that could be involved? - CO

- Himself
- Vet from Tirana

GK:

- Gives Ilir that option of a shorter path that avoids the steep part of the trail for hike
- Water source of the river mostly comes from the mountains behind

Appendix K: Interview with Speleology Society Member

About the cave:

- The cave was explored for the first time in the 1990's.
- They have found caves bears as well as skeletons of humans
- Some caves are set up like museums or national parks
- The professors have been writing papers to request for funds, but they haven't succeeded yet to get money.
- The OAA is the only organization that has done work on the cave (to knowledge)
- The speleology society is small in Albania, mainly professors. Some people do expeditions, joined with other countries
- *(Did not have much information about the geological significance of the Cave of Pellumbas)*
- Archeology would be known by Italian Cave group that did the first research

His experiences:

- Said he can send an announcement to speleology society if we were to work with them for the Cave of Pellumbas
- Tour groups love meeting locals and being immersed in the culture (want CBT versus large resorts)
- Albania tourism fair Dec. 8th, "Tourism in Albania" in Tirana from NTO (National Tourism Organization)

Funding Options:

- Look for organizations with a target area, German International Corporation has done similar work?
- Albanian Speleology Society uses Swiss markings, could have people help mark trail
- Czech Embassy supposedly interested in marking a trail
- Gorge might be a Natural Monument?

For success (in his opinion):

- First build trail (including mapping of the trail), create publications, advertise the trip, tourists begin to come

Appendix L: Interview with Polis University Research Assistant

Project he's currently working on:

- Currently working in the Albanian Alps with an American guy from the Peace Corps

In his view, the best way to involve the community:

- i.e. children plant trees versus the city, this makes the community more connected
- Important for village to have a sense of belonging/responsibility
- Teaching English in high schools example: give kids colors to paint with so they physically learn words versus just learning them in theory
- For people to see the benefits, they have to be the ones who build it
- Figure out where you can put things so that way villagers feel involved
- This involvement/connection has been missing due to communism
- Ask people "where do you think...?" and try to involve them with doing things

How to initiate (in his opinion)?

- Get a group of people and talk about it

How to implement (in his opinion)?

- Maybe (what worked for him) present vision in front of town (town meeting) but not successful because people were told to be there...
- Instead: get to know people who everyone knows (i.e. elder, etc) and convince them of vision. Everyone listens to elder's opinions.
 - However they may not be flexible and there is a language barrier
- Also involve younger kids, they can help influence their parents and many are starting to learn English

What else to consider?

- Look into a personal achievement, something that would help people think differently
- Go there and show that people are interested.

Appendix M: “About” and “Description” from Cave of Pellumbas Facebook Page

About

Discover the hidden wonders of Albania by visiting the Cave of Pellumbas and surrounding area. <http://pellumbascave.weebly.com/>

Description

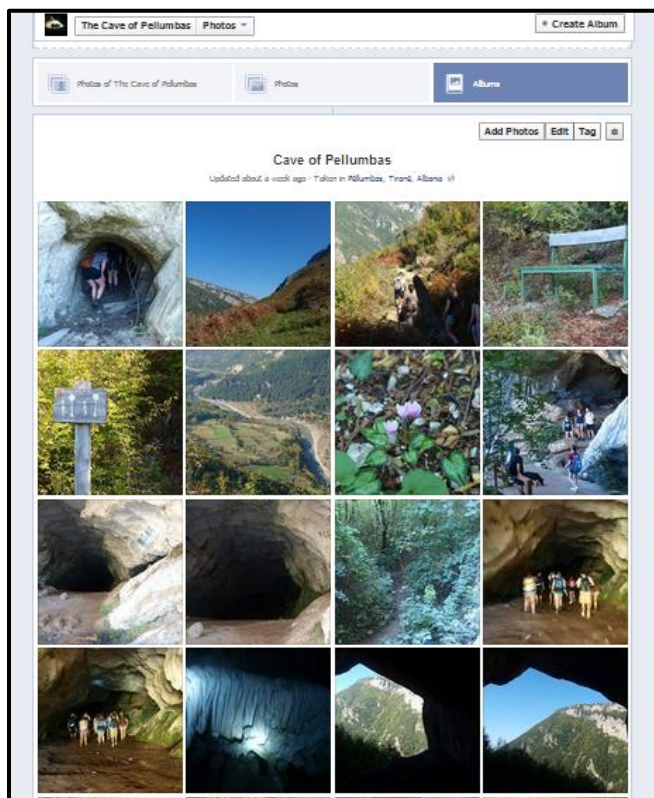
The village of Pellumbas is located a little over 20 km southeast of Albania's capital city of Tirana. The village of Pellumbas marks the start of the trail to the unique and mysterious Cave of Pellumbas. One of only six of its kind in all of Europe, the Cave of Pellumbas is a must see natural attraction. The beautiful Erzen River runs near the small village as well and is frequented by many during the summer months for swimming in the turquoise blue water amongst the natural limestone canyon. The village of Pellumbas also offers a rustic, traditional feel and provides visitors the opportunity to experience traditional Albanian cuisine and freshly made goods. The informations of guides for tours of this region are provided at the bottom of this section.

The Cave of Pellumbas is also known as The Black Cave (Shpelle e Zeze in Albanian). During World War II the cave was used by local villagers as a place of hiding from the Nazis regime. During the communist era, the cave was kept a secret by the locals and has only been revealed to the outside people after communist rule in 1992. Recently, archeological research conducted by the Tirana Archeological Institute and Italian Universities on the cave have reveal the remains of an ancient species of cave bear (*Ursus Spelaeus*). Remains of this ancient species of bear have only been found in six other caves across Europe, making the Cave of Pellumbas very special. The remains of the bears date back to the years 10,000 to 400,000 BC. Traces of human activity dating back to the Paleolithic period (300,000 to 30,000 BC) have also been discovered in the cave. The cave stretches approximately 360 meters into the mountain side and is home to many species of bats. Impressive stalactites and stalagmites can also be found in the cave, some as tall as several meters long. Speleothems (stalactites and stalagmites) have an average growth rate of 0.13 mm per year and form. The trail to the cave as we'll as a platform at the cave's entrance was constructed in 2009 by the Outdoor Albania Association, a non-profit organization based out of Tirana.

The hike the Erzen River is full of beautiful views of the mountainous countryside of Albania. Farmers harvesting olives and other crops can be seen in the hike. Many species of wild fruits and herbs can also been seen and collected along the trail. The trail guides you to a part of the river where canyons begin to rise up over the water. The water is a breathtaking blue color and is pleasant for swimming during the summer months, so come prepared! Spring water can be seen flowing out if the adjacent mountain side and flows into the Erzen. Trails to the river are accessible from both the village and the cave and can be difficult at times.

The village of Pellumbas has a population of around 400 people. There are two cafés in the village which serve many traditional Albanian dishes. The food is fresh and provided by the farmers of the village. Don't forget to try some of the homemade wine or raki (traditional Albanian drink). Goods are also available for purchase at both of the cafés. Local guides are also available in the village and are more than willing to give guided tours to both the cave and river. Stop by the village at one of the Albanian or religious days of celebrations and take part in an authentic dining and traditions of the villagers.

Appendix N: Screenshots from Cave of Pellumbas Facebook Page



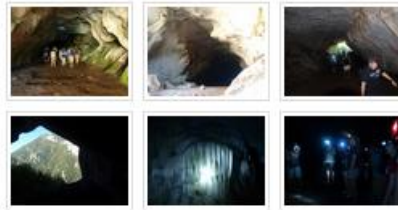
Appendix O: Screenshots from Cave of Pellumbas Website





The Cave of Pellumbas

The Cave of Pellumbas, or the Black Cave (Shpelle e Zezë), is about an hour hike outside the village of Pellumbas. The cave itself is approximately 380 meters deep, and inside are impressive stalagmites and stalactites, as well as bats flying around the cave. The inside of the cave is completely dark after single upon entrance. 40,000 years ago the cave was a home to ancient cave bears. It was later used as a settlement for ancient humans during the Middle Paleolithic period. During the World Wars, the cave was kept secret and used as a hiding spot for the villagers. In more recent years, the cave has become a day trip for both foreign and Albanian visitors.



The Village of Pellumbas

There is only one road going in and out of the village. Unfortunately, the condition of this road is treacherous and, even in a small bus, it is very difficult to navigate. Once in the village there is a small, central area that contains the only small businesses established in this region. These businesses include two cafes, which both serve food, and a hair salon. After speaking with various locals in the village, we determined that there are approximately 100 families inhabiting Pellumbas. These families rely heavily on producing their own food and materials to survive. And although there are some income generating also came to understand that many villagers produce handmade crafts and items that are unique to Pellumbas. Along the road to the village is a small school where most of the local children are educated. All of these cultural aspects within Pellumbas combine to create a unique rural tourism destination.



One Day Agenda

9:00AM —
Arrive in the village, stop at one of the local cafés for fresh food and coffee.

9:30AM —
Start your trek to the Cave of Pellumbas

10:30AM —
Arrive at the Cave of Pellumbas, put on headlamps, and explore the cave.

11:00AM —
Hike down to the river.

12:00PM —
If weather allows, go for a swim in the crystal clear waters of the Erzen River.


1:00PM —
Hike back to Pellumbas through the village's farms and woodlands.

2:00PM —
Stop at one of the cafés for a late lunch of locally produced foods.

3:00PM —
Before you leave, be sure to check out the cafés' shops for the local goods offered in Pellumbas

Traveling to Pellumbas


The village of Pellumbas is located approximately 20 km southeast of Albania's capital city, Tirana. It can be found by traveling on the highway towards Elbasan, and taking a left turn at the "Kame Teater" advertisement sign.




For further information, check out Pellumbas' Facebook page and website.

<https://www.facebook.com/PellumbasCave>

<http://pellumbascave.weebly.com/>



Cave of Pellumbas



Pellumbas Attractions

The Cave

The Cave of Pellumbas is the featured attraction of the region and features naturally beautiful architecture, geology, and history.

Explore the cave which was home to prehistoric cave bears and humans. The cave also boasts amazing rock formations and many species of bats.



Stalagmites and stalactites that can be found inside of the

- 360 meters deep
- Walls ranging 10-15 meters wide and 15 to 45 meters in height
- Human remains discovered date back to the Paleolithic era
- Ancient cave bear (*Ursus speleaus*) fossils date back to 10,000-400,000 years ago. Only six caves in Europe have these cave bear fossils!

*Where
Nature and
History Come
Together*



The Erzen River



The Erzen River flows through the area nearby the village of Pellumbas. Its stunning blue water is surrounded by the walls of a large limestone gorge. The river is frequented by many during the summer months for swimming and fun.

*Breathtaking
Sites and Views*



Along the trail to the river you will see olive, cherry, and Irish strawberry trees. Irish strawberries are unique to the area, and you can try the red berries as you hike.

The Village



The village of Pellumbas marks the start of the trail to the Cave of Pellumbas and Erzen River. The village offers the opportunity to experience the unique cultures of Albania, from the fresh, local cuisine to the harvesting of olives.

Within the village there are two cafés that serve and sell traditional food and drink to Albania. Be sure to try the local wine, raki, cheeses, grapes, and other fresh produce.



*Experience
Traditional Albania*

